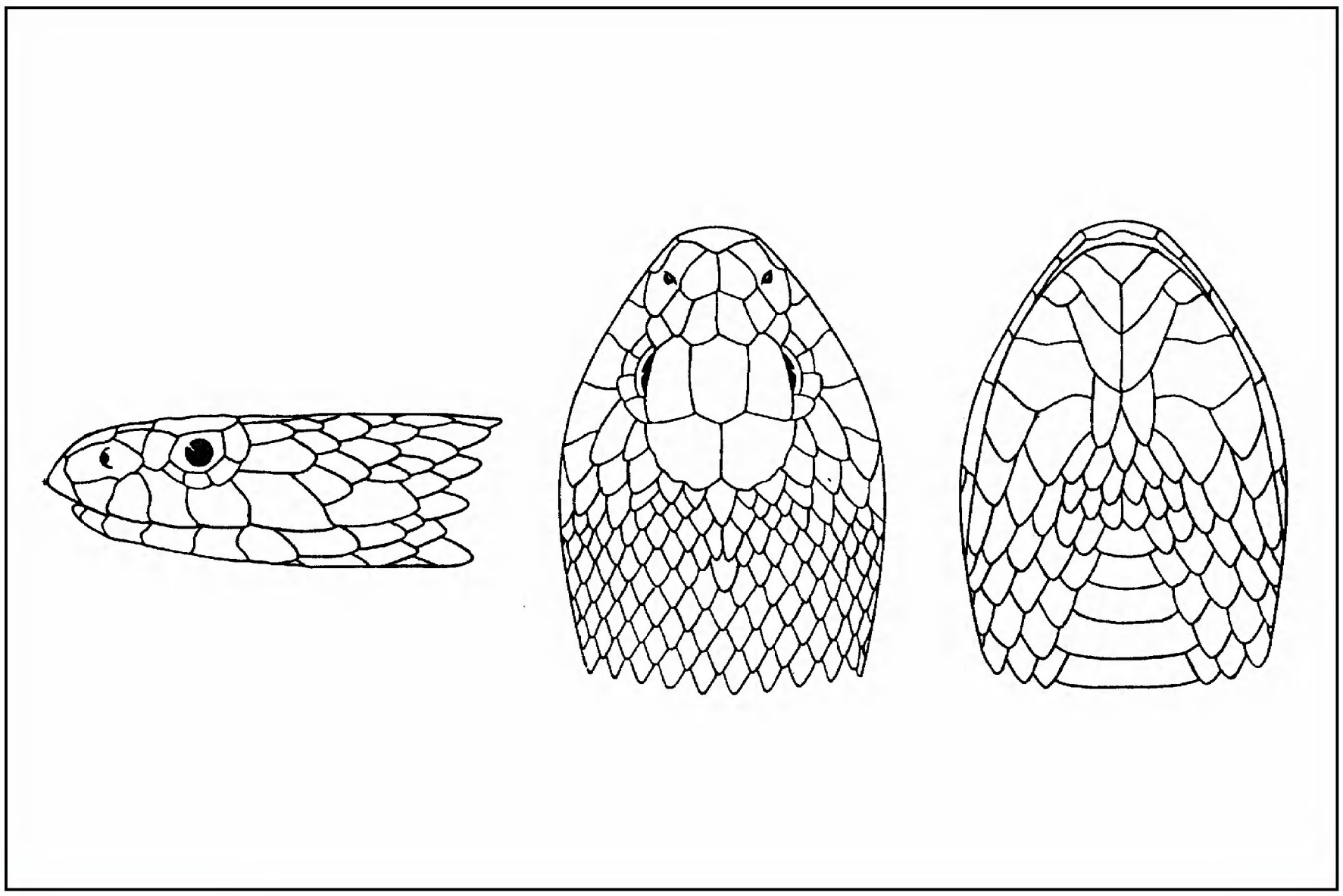
BULLETIN
of the
Chicago Herpetological Society

Volume 38, Number 10
October 2003



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Membership in the CHS includes a subscription to the monthly *Bulletin*. Annual dues are: Individual Membership, $25.00; Family Membership, $28.00; Sustaining Membership, $50.00; Contributing Membership, $100.00; Institutional Membership, $38.00. Remittance must be made in U.S. funds. Subscribers outside the U.S. must add $12.00 for postage. Send membership dues or address changes to: Chicago Herpetological Society, Membership Secretary, 2430 N. Cannon Drive, Chicago, IL 60614.

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Visit the CHS home page at <http://www.Chicagoherp.org>.

The *Bulletin of the Chicago Herpetological Society* (ISSN 0009-3564) is published monthly by the Chicago Herpetological Society, 2430 N. Cannon Drive, Chicago IL 60614. Periodicals postage paid at Chicago IL. **Postmaster:** Send address changes to: Chicago Herpetological Society, Membership Secretary, 2430 N. Cannon Drive, Chicago IL 60614.

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Bull. Chicago Herp. Soc. 38(10):193-203, 2003

The Australian Herp Scene as of Early 2003—Part II

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The Bad Old Days

Back in the 1970s and 1980s reptile thefts were a major problem. Particularly in the state of New South Wales (NSW). In the early 1990s the incidence of the problem declined, but in the last three years or so, it's mushroomed yet again. The only good thing about this is that the fear of having his snakes stolen is perhaps what led to John Weigel keeping his rough-scaled pythons at his home rather than "off-display" at the Reptile Park. And as I said before, when the place burnt down, the snakes were spared.

I couldn't tell you about all the reptile thefts that have happened in recent times here in Australia—there are too many of them. But here's just a few:

On 15 May 2000 a shop in the Sydney suburb of Rozelle had 20 bird-eating spiders (*Selenocosmia stirlingi*) stolen. The spiders, worth between $40 and $50 each, were among $13,000 worth of exotic creatures stolen from Urban Animals Pet Care, in Darling Street, Rozelle, between 7 and 11 P.M.

Matt Yorkston, a prominent keeper in Darwin had his facility busted into in the summer of 1999–2000. He lost a pile of pythons including greens, which are generally the most expensive and sought after in the country. By the way it's the paper that's worth the money, not the snake. Legal hatchlings sell here for about $5,000 each, while the illegal ones (smuggled in) go for about $1–2 thousand a pop.

How many smuggled chondros make it into Australia each year? My guess is about a hundred a year. But if you add all the other stuff like Burmese pythons (*Python molurus*), corn snakes (*Elaphe guttata*) and the like, you'd be talking thousands of reptiles coming in each year.

As for boa constrictors (*Boa constrictor*), well that's a slightly different story. Legally there aren't too many here, well under a hundred anyway, but illegal ones probably number several thousand and by all indications they are breeding like er, well boas, and we should be able to export the things within a few years.

But getting back to Matt Yorkston's snakes, there were allegations that some of the snakes resurfaced in a New South Wales collection later in 2000, from where they were being offered for sale. But when the NSW NPWS were called in to the house they allegedly found nothing.

Then there was a keeper in Victoria who had his facility broken into a few months later. He lost a pile of exotics (herps that aren't native to Australia). In fact he lost about 40 of them. Mainly the usual sort of things—Burmese and ball pythons, boas, corn snakes of various kinds, etc. His problem was that none of them were legal.

I first found out about the theft at a Victorian Herpetological Society meeting when I took leave from the lecture and walked my year-old baby outside the lecture hall. It was like a police stakeout—blokes hiding behind poles and cars spying on the people coming and going.

I asked one of them what was going on. "Oh don't worry Raymond, it's not you we're after. (Name deleted) had his snakes knocked off and we are seeing if any get offered for sale in the car park." Eventually (name deleted) went to the police to report the theft. That was several weeks later. The delay of course was because of his own fear of being done over by the authorities for the illegal snakes.

The police weren't concerned with the legality of the snakes, but didn't seem too concerned with finding the thieves either. Here in Australia the police often seem to be more concerned with peddling drugs to crime bosses, taking bribes for protection and so on. Actual policing seems to be an unnecessary diversion for many.

Herp Personalities

I'm sure most readers have been told that they must be mad to want to keep reptiles as pets. And yes, most herpers are a bit different to what society calls "normal." When I was in Adelaide [see Part I of this series, Bull. Chicago Herp. Soc. 38(8):157-165], Roly Burrell told me that someone should write a book about the various personalities involved in the Australian herp scene. I think that was while I was trying to eat the hairy steak. I didn't know all the people he was thinking of, but he soon enough rattled off the names. I thought of a few who'd make interesting biographies.

Like . . . Brian Bush, who's one of the best known herpetologists in Western Australia. His other claim to fame is that he's extremely well-hung and when he's in the field looking for snakes, he doesn't hesitate to show his own off to his fellow herpers.

Or Roy Pails (the Ballarat snake breeder), whose most notable non-herp achievement was driving the 60-odd kilometers from Geelong to Ballarat after a herpetological society meeting when he was dead sober. It was notable because every other time we could recall, he'd done the trip blind drunk!

And then of course one tiny word that you inadvertently put out of place can make you a ratbag for life. We call that herp politics. Because I sometimes write about stuff on the edge, I'm always getting off-side with people, but have learnt to live with it. Fortunately time makes most (but not all) wounds heal.

But I've got to tell you about an innocent incident that made

me laugh. It was at my 1999 wedding. That was quite a gathering. My wife's friends were mainly pure and wholesome Catholics from the local God Squad. My crowd were mainly herpers, which also means that most were uncouth, unshaven loud-mouthed heavy drinkers. It was like chalk and cheese. And because the alcohol was laid on, all the herpers got drunk as could be and said and did a lot of things that they'd rather not remember. There was a bit of fireworks when the groups mixed—but we all had fun.

About a week later young Scott Eipper (he's the bloke into blacksnakes [*Pseudechis*]) told me that Roy Pails "has the s**ts with me." I asked him why, to which he replied, "Well, I spent about an hour talking to him at your wedding and he only grunted at me—I don't think Roy likes me." I told Scott, "Don't worry, Pails grunts at everyone!"

Then there was the 20-year-old herper in Sydney who decided to have ten puff adders brought in during 1996. It was the usual sort of method—through the postal system. Like most reptiles brought in this way, they got through undetected. He gave them to his mate to keep as pets. And yes, one of them bit the friend and he landed up in hospital. The newspapers got onto the story and then the NPWS came chasing them. But they were never caught.

Why?

Because the two blokes gave false names to the media. In hindsight it was quite a stunt, as one of them even got shown on TV doing an interview. Some of those snakes were "claimed on" in the NPWS amnesty the following year. One of the pair did the same sort of thing with a chameleon. It died in transit and because the parcel stank to high heaven, it got picked up by the postal workers and opened. Even that's quite amazing as the fact is that the sniffer dogs aren't half as good as they're cracked up to be . . . and the postal staff are so lazy that they'd rather just let everything through. You see, there's no incentive for them to slow the flow. In fact quite the contrary. If they find some contraband and have to fill in the paperwork, they might be delayed in leaving work.

In the 1980s, I knew a bloke who worked in the Redfern Mail Exchange as a sorter. These are the blokes who are meant to be vigilant and on the ball and stopping the contraband from coming in. Near the end of the shift one of the staff had a heart attack and died almost instantly. It was approaching the weekend and the rest of the group wanted to go home in a hurry. So rather than deal with their newly dead co-worker they merely propped him up in a corner to make him look alive and then they went home. The next shift's workers had to find the dead body and deal with it. And you think that they are so keen to work that they'd worry about opening suspicious looking parcels?

But getting back to the dead chameleon in the parcel, like I said before, this parcel was picked up. The bloke who'd imported it was interviewed by NPWS, but they were unable to nab him as such.

Why?

You see, the sender had given a fake name. That wasn't a good start. Inside the parcel was a letter. It said that the lizard was "a gift." That implied that the recipient didn't even know it was coming, thereby potentially making him innocent of any alleged smuggling. And then there was the name of the person the parcel was addressed to. It wasn't him. The address was correct, but the name of the addressee wasn't. Who was the addressee? Peter Rankin.

Who's he?

Rankin was one of Australia's most prominent herpers who died accidentally some 20 years ago in New Caledonia. Why did the men pick that name for the recipient? I never found out, but it probably had something to do with their warped sense of humor.

Now how do I know all this to be true? One of the herpers told me the story in confidence. When I checked up with a contact of mine in the NPWS, they agreed it was a correct account.

Are All Dead Herpers Crims?

Well according to some wildlife officers, "All herpetologists are smugglers." We know it's a misconception, but the misconception goes even further with the dead herpers. A few years ago there was a bust involving a number of illegal reptiles here in Victoria. The local wildlife department went through a heap of their paperwork and found out that people were keeping reptiles over and above what they were meant to. In other words some wild-caught critters were being put onto the books as legally held and captive-bred.

Now there were allegedly quite a few herpers in on the scam, but they managed to arrange things so that just one herper took the rap (was found guilty of the whole lot). That was Big Wayne.

But he'd died a few months earlier.

And it's impossible to prosecute a dead man, so everyone was happy.

Are All Live Herpers Crims?

No, but some are. When it comes to bringing snakes in or out of Australia the fact is most get through undetected. And, with the exception of the obvious computer data matching activities by customs officials at airports and the like, which inevitably target all "high risk" persons such as known herpetologists (reptile smuggling), competitive body builders (steroids) and so on, the fact is that most wildlife smuggling busts are by accident rather than design. But even so, there are far more busts than I could ever keep up with.

That may be because when someone like myself talks about "big brother" activities like computers doing simple data-matching programs a lot of people get the idea that I'm talking about wild conspiracy theories and not the real world. Thus they don't believe that things like computer data matching are done as a routine and so they fall into the most obvious of traps. In retrospect it's a bit like the rats going into the old-style wooden rat-traps. And quite frankly, the data matching activities of the customs computers aren't really all that much

more high tech than the wooden rat-traps I just referred to. Put it this way, a crappy old 386 computer would probably do the trick, and yes, the Australian government can afford a lot more than that. Government zoos like Adelaide, Taronga and Melbourne are always overflowing with exotic and native reptiles picked up from people coming and going out of Australia.

Like Czech tourist Ales Havelka who was busted on 8 February 2000 trying to smuggle 11 Leaf-tailed geckos (*Phyllurus platurus*), 13 Knob-tailed geckos (*Nephrurus* sp.) and seven beaked geckos (*Lucasium* sp.) onto a Vienna bound flight at Melbourne's Tullamarine airport. Havelka was an "easy" bust. The customs officers just walked up to him and searched him. He had the lizards secreted in pouches in his clothing, with a few more in his hand luggage. For the customs officers it was dead easy in fact!

Why did they search him?

Data matching of course. Havelka was a well-known herpetologist with a collection in his home at Brno numbering over 100 lizards. Besides that, he'd previously been busted for trafficking reptiles in Mauritius and Peru and so was listed on half the world's customs databases. You'd bet everything you'd own on him being searched before leaving Australia.

Ditto for Joseph Sin, another Czech nabbed at the same place two days later. Data-matching got him too! He'd been taking ten birds eggs out of the country.

Or the Christmas Eve 1999 bust of a 36-year-old German man attempting to export more than 80 native snakes and lizards. He was arrested at Geraldton as he tried to send 59 Australian skinks by post to Germany. Lutz Obelgoenner's car was searched revealing an assortment of 27 other Australian reptiles being discovered inside a portable cooler. The reptiles included monitors, skinks, geckos and pythons. Authorities alleged that the man had been under surveillance for a month before the bust.

Earlier the same month (2 December to be exact) another German, Ralph Deiter Zeiler, 43, was arrested as he boarded an international flight in Adelaide with 74 Australian lizards in his baggage. Among the reptiles found in Zeiler's possession were 29 starred knob-tailed geckos (*Nephrurus* sp.), two Pernatty knob-tailed geckos (*Nephrurus* sp.), 24 southern spiny-tailed geckos (*Diplodactylus* sp.), six barking geckos (*Underwoodisaurus mili*) and one Burton's legless lizard (*Lialis burtonis*). There were also seven western stone geckos (*Diplodactylus* sp.), three bearded geckos (*Lucasium* sp.) and three shingleback skinks (*Trachydosaurus rugosa*).

The Pernatty knob-tailed gecko in particular is a sought after species, currently known only from a few remote sites in inland South Australia near Woomera. On 28 April 2000, Justice David Wicks effectively sentenced Zeiler, for six months jail, with the sentence commencing from the date of arrest. Zeiler, a well-known herper, had been flagged by the customs computer (in the manner I noted above) and had little chance of boarding the flight out of Australia without being searched.

Yes, it was like the rat going into the rat-trap. But again I ask the most logical question of all. Why doesn't the Australian government stop making criminals out of otherwise law-abiding people and simply allow the legal export of a reasonable number of these reptiles. I really can't imagine knob-tailed geckos overrunning the ice-covered fields of Bavaria in northern Europe and going feral.

Scratching

Sometimes it's not the herpers that put themselves in—rather it's their herps themselves. In December 1998, Norikazu Amagi came unstuck when lizards he'd posted his mates back to Japan began to scratch in their boxes. The lizards in question were shinglebacks and in a four-day period, he posted a total of four boxes containing 24 shinglebacks. By virtue of the fact that he'd only arrived in Australia a few days earlier, it seems likely that someone in Perth had probably already got hold of the lizards for him, before he arrived. On 24 December 1998, just three days after he'd been busted for posting the last of the parcels, Amagi pled guilty to trafficking charges and copped a $20,000 fine. That was less than the lizards were worth.

The previous month two other Japanese nationals were fined $23,000 for attempting to export fauna illegally. They'd also come unstuck when their parcels that they'd posted to Japan started to move and make noises.

Good and Bad

Now in case you get the wrong idea I don't want to make out that these people getting busted by Australian officials for collecting reptiles from the wild and then taking them either interstate or out of the country to study or merely keep as pets are the bad guys. Quite often the reverse is the truth.

It's often the ones who make the laws and enforce them who are doing more harm for the environment. Remember, a simple piece of paper can make the difference between a legal trader like Gavin Bedford (see earlier) who can legally trap thousands of reptiles and effectively do what he likes with them, while some poor mug who wants a few for study goes to jail as an alleged smuggler, simply because he doesn't seem to have the same connections with the same wildlife officials.

Take for example my account of Roy Pails, whom I mentioned in one of the *Smuggled* books. He got busted for taking a few common scrub pythons (*Austroliasis amethistina*) from North Queensland into Victoria (contrary to his license conditions). His legal indiscretion wasn't because he was "bad" or a "monster," but rather because at the same time, the legal regime made it effectively impossible for him to get these common snakes legally.

So yes, he effectively "smuggled" them interstate. But who really were the bad guys? Pails for shipping a few common snakes—snakes that more often than not get a shovel through their heads when they encounter humans in their native North Queensland, or the fauna officers who spent tens of thousands of tax-payer's dollars pursuing him—money that could much better have been spent actually helping Pails move

the snakes interstate and/or other projects to do with wildlife conservation and research.

When Pails was able to dodge the fauna officials who sometimes even camped outside his Ballarat home in their zeal to bust him for something, he actually managed to do quite a few captive breeding firsts for Australian reptiles. And here's the sort of recognition he got for his pioneering work with reptiles from the authorities.

Tony Zidarich reported in an internal wildlife department memo that Pails was "notorious" on the basis that he had a "large collection." Yes, it really seems that the mindset of wildlife officials here in Australia is that everyone here with a large collection is a smuggler and/or fair game to be busted for something.

Anyway, Pails' good work for herpetology was recognized a few years back when he had a new genus and species of snake named in his honor (*Pailsus pailsei*).

Reward for Doing the Right Thing

While talking about persecuted herpetologists in my (new) home state of Victoria, I can't help but mention Stewart Bigmore from Lara, near Geelong. His main claim to fame here is that he's one of the most prominent breeders of monitors in Australia. Those who have read *Smuggled-2* would recall that he was one of the mugs who had his sand goannas (*Varanus gouldii*) seized by Tony Zidarich and his mates in the local wildlife department on the (then) false pretext that they were *V. panoptes* — a species that was "unscheduled." "Unscheduled" meaning that you cannot keep them.

You'd recall that he didn't get an apology from the department for having his lizards illegally taken, but he did eventually get them back — provided he then shipped them out of the state.

In 1999 he bred his lace monitors (*Varanus varius*), by crossing his broad banded (Bell's) form female with a normal phase male. The genetics here appears to be a simple dominant/recessive relationship and the idea being bandied around outside Australia that they are different species is a complete myth. His eggs hatched and he got both kinds of young, the broad banded (Bell's) and the normal form.
Did the department officials ever congratulate Bigmore?
No of course not — instead they rewarded him with one of their usual unannounced "visits" to do a head count of his stock.

If for some reason your number is out — even by just one, you are deemed to have committed a greater crime than murder or raping a ten-year-old girl. Anyway, about a year later he got yet another of these so-called "visits" and they did a head-count of his stock. And the officials got what they were looking for — a wrong head count. Bigmore had one lace monitor over and above his licensed number.

Now what exactly are lace monitors like here in Australia? Yes, we kill them as pests. Don't we do that to all our reptiles? Does the wildlife department stop the slaughter? Of course not. Instead they go for the soft targets like Bigmore. Now if Bigmore had a large protective bureaucracy on side like the local zoo or museum, he'd be in with a chance of arguing leniency, but because he wasn't an employee of such a body, he was basically thrown to the dogs. That's local terminology for the legal system.

So while in one part of the country you had Gavin Bedford capturing thousands of monitor lizards legally for the pet trade — solely or at least primarily to make money — a person who wasn't making a cent out of the animals was being thrown to the full force of the law for having just one too many.

And how did Bigmore get this excess lizard? It was brought to him. Yes, it was one of those countless lizards that had been bowled over by some motorist driving their car who either couldn't be bothered swerving to miss the lizard, or even more likely had swerved to hit it! Bigmore was shelling out huge vet bills to keep the thing alive and nurse it back to health. And as I've already said, his reward for doing so was a criminal charge and thousands more dollars spent defending himself in court.

He pleaded guilty to the charge (one lizard too many) and it was heard on Wednesday, January 17, 2001. The magistrate made sure that he kept everyone happy. He declared Bigmore "guilty." But to make sure Bigmore was happy as well, the magistrate gave him a "token fine" of $200 plus $120 "costs" and a twelve-month so-called "Good Behavior Bond." Bigmore got "no conviction." That meant his reptile keeping license wasn't in danger. As I said before, the magistrate kept everyone as happy as he could while looking after the powers that be and those who pay his wages.

Truisms Are Sometimes True

But truisms do sometimes come from the truth — or at least trends. That includes the wildlife officer's fixation with the idea that all herpetologists are smugglers. In *Smuggled-2*, I mentioned the case of Taronga Zoo employee Michael Muscatt, who rorted [= Australian slang for "tricked"] the system in NSW at the time that licenses to keep were generally unobtainable. Sydney-based Muscatt got himself a pair of black-headed pythons (*Aspidites melanocephalus*) from unknown sources and then sold them off sometime later — allegedly at a huge profit.

But again, Muscatt's actions can be defended in that they were the product of a system that drove an otherwise reasonable, law-abiding person to use his relatively unusual position as keeper in a government-owned zoo to break or at least rort a system of stupid laws.

In 1999 it wasn't Muscatt who came under official investigation, but rather one of his good mates. That was Brian Starkey, business partner of David Williams (mentioned earlier in this article and in the two *Smuggled* books). Starkey calls himself and his reptile dealership in Ravenshoe, North Queensland, Black Knight Reptiles (BKR).

In 1999 Starkey unlawfully posted a jungle carpet python (*Morelia cheynei*) and some geckos to Muscatt in Sydney. Muscatt was busted. According to a post by Bob Withey on the Australian herps list-server, dated 20 January 2000,

Starkey later alleged that postal workers had been tipped off about the parcel by police. Starkey had allegedly said that he thought the culprit may have been his friend who drove him to the post office to post the parcel. At the time of Withey's post, Starkey had just pled guilty (a few weeks earlier) to the interstate smuggling charge, been convicted and fined $1,200. Muscatt again appeared to have escaped official scrutiny by the NSW and Queensland wildlife authorities. Although in fairness to both, if Muscatt had denied knowledge of the parcel being sent to him, there is probably little they could do in terms of prosecuting him.

Because of this anomaly, it is common practice for smugglers to post themselves reptiles. They simply put on the parcel a false return address and if they can avoid being monitored posting the parcel, then their odds of successfully smuggling the reptiles and/or not being successfully prosecuted if later caught receiving the packages are greatly increased. But are Starkey and Muscatt the villains?

In a word, no. First, I have no hard evidence here to implicate Muscatt with anything either legally or morally wrong. As for Starkey, I think it's fair to say he did do a little bit of interstate smuggling. Remember he did plead guilty. But what exactly was he sending? A snake and lizard that are almost in plague proportions where he lived. He wasn't posing any threat to any species or much else for that matter. Again the case was more an advertisement for liberalizing the laws, rather than an indication that Starkey was a bad guy as such.

Or take the case of Mick Pugh in Geelong. Now Mick's a good friend of mine and will no doubt be upset that I mention him as a smuggler in an article, but he knows my style—I must write without fear or favor to retain my credibility. He's been a herpetologist for decades, as has his wife Mip. That's right, their names are Mick and Mip, er Puke! It gets confusing doesn't it?

Anyway he got busted on 22 October 1999 bringing a few exotic (Non-Australian) herps into the country. A mate in the Netherlands posted him some reptiles and for reasons I'm not certain of, the parcel was intercepted at Mick's local post office. Mick went to collect the package, was monitored opening it and whammo! He was busted. He was hit with charges and had to face the local court.

As it turned out, the smuggling scheme was pretty basic and so the local customs officers thought that Mick was a bit of a dope. Anyway, it later turned out that it was they who were the dopes. You see Mick was charged under the usual anti-smuggling laws and had to front the local Geelong Magistrate's Court. The customs officers were led to believe that Mick would plead innocent to the charges and so the matter would be adjourned to another hearing date for the full-blown battle. At the last minute Mick got up in court and pleaded guilty to the charge of intentionally and recklessly importing live animals without a permit (effectively impossible to get).

Mick then gave a cock-and-bull story about how he'd been unknowingly posted the reptiles by a friend who owed him about $50. He made out that he was a real fool and how he'd never expected the snakes in the first place because he'd merely written off the debt. Magistrate Ian Von Einem fell for the ruse but decided to hit Mick hard. He got a $1,500 fine, plus $600 "costs," a total of $2,100.

That's a lot for $50 worth of snake isn't it?

Yes and no. You see the snakes were actually worth far more, but the magistrate was just another snake-hating Australian and so fell for the lie that the snakes were virtually worthless. What were the snakes? Two western diamondback rattlesnakes (*Crotalus atrox*). Also in the parcel were four banana geckos (*Gehyra baliola*) and a leopard gecko (*Eublepharis macularius*). And here in Australia's black-market these snakes and lizards were probably worth more than the fine. So if the magistrate had wanted to deter other would-be offenders, he failed. Maybe he should have actually looked closer at the snakes and worked out what they were really worth?

Mick was okay in terms of the law as well. You see he'd given his evidence in terms of mitigation of penalty, not sworn evidence and so he couldn't be charged with anything in terms of potentially misleading the court.

And so the game of snakes and ladders goes on and on. And yes, while Mick got caught bringing exotic reptiles into Melbourne, he could even argue that he was unlucky on that score. You see most still get in undetected.

And was Mick a threat to the local herpetofauna?

No way. You see the snakes would probably freeze to death if they ever got loose and so there was no risk of them becoming feral.

So who does benefit from the laws used to prosecute Mick? The bureaucrats who run them, that's who. Oh, and the dopey magistrates like Ian Von Einem, who gets paid nearly $2,000 for a five-hour working day to hear cases like the one above and then shoot through early for a game of golf with his fellow magistrates. I'd say that's the real racket.

And while talking about Mick, perhaps I should also mention that for some years now he's been the president of the Victorian Association of Amateur Herpetologists. Now anyone who knows anything about herpetological societies knows that running them is a huge and thankless task. And believe me, Mick's done an exceptional job in terms of running the society and its objectives of public education, reptile conservation and so on. So yes, Mick's done far more for the conservation of reptiles in Australia than the entire army of bureaucrats who administer the laws that were used to prosecute him for bringing into Australia a few lousy exotic reptiles.

Alone?

Was Mick alone in his smuggling?

Yes and no. You see in this smuggling action, there was just Mick and the bloke who posted him the reptiles.
To that extent they were alone. But there's so many more parcels getting in to the countless other reptile people here in Australia, that the relatively few that get picked up by officials are notable for that very reason—they get picked up. Just before Mick was nabbed, someone in Sydney got nabbed with

a parcel sent from the UK containing 30 snakes and four iguanas. And a week after Mick's bust in October 1999, someone else was nabbed at Melbourne airport with a pair of Malaysian snail-eating turtles (*Malayemys subtriuga*). The passenger was searched when getting off the plane. Why? Data matching again.

But the interesting part of the story is what happened to the Malaysian snail eating turtles. They were shunted off to Melbourne Zoo, (along with everything else that gets seized in Victoria). Did the zoo really want them? Probably not, but their job is to take the stuff the authorities give them—diseases and all. Anyway one of the turtles died within days of arriving from eating a snail. Why? The snail had just eaten snail bait.

Geelong Again

Geelong's not a big place. It's a cold, wet, miserable windswept hole of a town an hour's drive south of Melbourne. But the town's mail system obviously does a roaring trade in illegal reptiles. Sometimes you actually wonder if the locals ever post anything else.

Remember, the smugglers who get caught posting reptiles through the system who get caught are only the tip of the iceberg and yes, there's been heaps of busts in Geelong. John Nelis came unstuck in 1998 after being caught posting a load of reptiles to Hong Kong and the UK. Customs officers finally charged him with posting 39 reptiles in a number of parcels. Included were a Gould's monitor (*Varanus gouldii*), shinglebacks, bearded dragons (*Pogona vitticeps*), geckos and a Krefft's tortoise (*Emydura krefftii*).

Based on that list, it was evident that Nelis was posting out almost anything he could get his hands on. Why do I say that? Who in their right mind would bother sending *Pogona vitticeps* out of Australia? After all, they breed like flies in the northern hemisphere already.

To cut a long story short, Nelis was charged and fronted court. He did what Mick Pugh did and pleaded stupid. Nelis's lawyer, Michael Coglan, said that Nelis wasn't getting paid for the stuff he was sending and had only received a measly $100 for his efforts. The judge, Eugene Cullity, decided not to jail him. But Nelis got stung with a $12,250 fine. A co-offender Trevor Bissell was also found guilty in court for his lesser role in the scheme. But he was let off with a good behavior bond.

Half Pregnant?

Can you be half pregnant? Of course not. Can you have half-legal keeping of reptiles? Well, here in Victoria you can. Let me explain.

A few years back in the late 1990s Neil Davie, who happens to live in Geelong, had a ball python (*Python regius*) passed onto him. He fronted the local wildlife department and said to them words to the effect of "Look, I have this snake and I want to keep it. Are you going to have a punch-up with me trying to take it, or are you going to let me keep it peacefully."

Now how that particular snake got to be here in Australia is a bit of mystery and you have already heard about how busy the postal system is down Geelong way. But there are no allegations or evidence here about Neil in terms of the postal system and for the purposes of this account it doesn't matter anyway. The situation at the time was that the local wildlife department just didn't want another brawl with Neil Davie.

He was one of the people who took it upon himself to fight the local authorities and eventually force them to relinquish their illegally seized *Varanus gouldii* from Stewart Bigmore and others. It was an embarrassing loss for a department not used to losing fights and so they decided that this time they wouldn't take on Neil Davie. After all, he only had one lousy exotic snake.

What's a ball python worth? If you say next to nothing, you are probably on the mark. But here in Australia (like everywhere else) we always want what we can't have. And because we aren't allowed to keep ball pythons, we all want them.

It's a bit like why everyone wants to keep rough-scaled pythons (*Morelia carinata*). What Neil had done was set a precedent. If he could keep an exotic snake, then why couldn't other people? And yes, that coupled with the customs department openly refusing to police their laws beyond the entry barriers (meaning that Neil was effectively legally correct to demand the right to keep the snake) led to the beginning of a still ongoing upsurge of non-Australian reptiles coming into the country and being kept by hobbyists.

It was then that the Victorian wildlife department (DNRE as they called themselves that week) decided to have an amnesty on exotic snakes and other animals. But unlike a normal amnesty whereby people could declare their holdings and not fear prosecution, the Victorian department decided to be very bureaucratic about the whole thing. By bureaucratic, I mean that they wanted to keep all their powers and let everyone knows who is boss: "We are!"

Thus the so-called amnesty was along the lines of "You declare your snakes and we will decide: a) whether or not to prosecute you for having these illegal animals; and b) whether or not to allow you to keep the snakes." It was a farce.

It's common knowledge that based on their own track records, you'd need to be certified to place your trust in anyone in government, especially people from wildlife departments. Now just so that you know what I have said is true I will go on with this account. Out of the thousands of people here in Victoria with exotic snakes, fewer than 20 people declared their holdings in the first year. Mick Pugh (see above) was one of the front men who lobbied the government into trying to get reason out of their nonexistent legal regime for exotic herps.

On behalf of thousands of reptile keepers, he said words to the effect of "Why should we declare our snakes to you if you won't promise not to seize them?" He went on "The exotic snakes in Australia are your problem and it will remain so until you actively seek a solution. You need our trust, we

don't need yours."

For once the wildlife department listened to reason and thus they decided to issue licenses for exotic reptiles. But as always there was a catch. The only people to get licenses were the dozen odd who'd actually declared that they had the exotic reptiles.

Without naming the individuals I know of one man who declared a single boa constrictor to the department when he actually had five. Why? Well, he reasoned that if they decided not to issue a license, he'd relinquish just one snake, not the other four, which he kept hidden. He was effectively testing the water with the department.

You can say ditto for some of the others who declared exotic reptiles to the department. And then of course, most people didn't bother trusting the department in the first instance and so they didn't even declare their holdings. And so you had a half-pregnant or half-legal licensing system for exotic reptiles in Victoria.

And as I write this piece now, I read in the papers that in December 2000, the local wildlife department officials have seized an iguana, boa constrictor and tarantulas from an unlicensed person in suburban Mount Martha who hadn't declared his holdings in the recent pseudo-amnesty.

Our Own Worst Enemy

Some people say that about herpetologists in terms of dealing with our adversaries in government and elsewhere. Ask any half-honest wildlife law enforcement officer their best means of investigating wildlife crime, reptile smugglers and the like and they'll tell you, "They put each other in." Like the Starkey matter detailed before. He'd probably have gotten away with posting the reptiles to Muscatt had his friend not put him in for it. You can ditto this for loads of similar cases.

Which brings me back to the half-pregnant licensing of exotic herps here in Victoria. Another overriding theme here in Australia is that the government has money to burn. That is on everything except useful conservation initiatives. Thus it was in late 2000 that the local Victorian wildlife department (called DNR now) decided to spend a lazy few thousand dollars on consultants that they didn't need. The money could have gone a long way to saving several endangered species, but if they'd done that then they might have got rid of their reason to exist in the first place and that'd mean job losses. And they didn't want that.

So they decided to burn the money on consultants instead. A high-profile city firm was engaged to "consult" with herpetologists and other so-called "stake-holders" in relation to what the department wanted to do with licensing exotic reptiles. There were four meetings in a city office building in Melbourne. The consultants employed by Price, Waterhouse Coopers knew about as much about the subject of exotic herps as I do about the inflation rate in 1965 in Mongolia. Put it this way the woman running the show evidently didn't know the difference between a Burmese and a carpet and up that point hadn't heard of either! Anyway she was getting paid a heap for her "expertise" so it didn't really matter.

Four long meetings and we all knew the story anyway. The keepers wanted to license the keeping of non-native reptiles and the department didn't want to and/or if they had to, would do so kicking and screaming.

Then there were other meetings by the Price, Waterhouse Coopers people with the other "sides," like the zoos, etc. We already knew their arguments as well. The government zoos wanted a monopoly on the right to keep non-native reptiles and the private zoos wanted a piece of the action. Private keepers were as always at the bottom of the pile. But like I said, the Price, Waterhouse, Coopers people made a bundle of cash out of the "consultancy."

At the first meeting I attended, I hit the lady running the show with a simple question. "How much will all this cost the department." The answer was "None of your business." So much for freedom of information and open government!

Someone in DNR later told me the cost of the meetings was in excess of $250,000 and worse still that they had no bearing on what the department was or wasn't going to do—in other words they may as well have pulled out a match and burn the cash. The department was merely using the meetings to try to get so-called recommendations that would coincide with what they had already decided. And so it was.

But there was another interesting upshot to all this. During the course of one of the meetings there were about 10 reptile people in the room telling the "consultants" what they wanted—legal exotics. One of the herpetologists mentioned in passing his boa constrictor. Now these meetings were supposedly in confidence so that the participants could be open and frank in stating their views. The next day his peace was broken by heavily armed police, wildlife officers and customs officials who came bursting through the front door of his Bayswater home.

He put his hands in the air. The officials wanted to take his illegal boa constrictor. But instead of leaving with a snake, they left with egg on their face. You see, his was one of the snakes licensed by the wildlife department in their half-pregnant amnesty. And who put him in to the department? A lady who'd attended the meeting as a so-called reptile keeper and wildlife carer.

Tracey Williams (as she called herself) had also taken up the role of informant for the local wildlife department in the hope of obtaining favors (read special keeping licenses) from them. What was that I said about reptile keepers and the like sometimes being our own worst enemies?

Our Own Worst Enemies Mark Two

Again I write about goings on in Victoria. But before you get the wrong impression about things here, I should give you my own opinion on the overall "quality" of herpetologists in this second most populous Australian state. While every state in Australia has their good, very good, bad and ugly people in the reptile business (like, I assume, everywhere else), here in Victoria I think the quality of herpetologists and keeping in

general is probably higher than in all other states.

Why? I have no idea. And I'm not saying this because I live here. I still think of Sydney as my home, so my loyalty is to that town, even though I don't live there anymore.
But it's generally conceded Australia-wide that the average quality of keeping and some of the keepers in NSW is the worst in the country. Most of course are fine, but the bad element there is more prominent than elsewhere.

But my tale of woe here in Victoria relates to the story of Henrietta, the 1.82 meter Queensland carpet python (*Morelia mcdowelli*). The snake disappeared from Travis Harding's Newport Flat in July 1998. Shortly thereafter some tradesmen working area saw the snake and called in a council contracted snake catcher.

Enter Tom Vida. He quickly caught the snake and sold the snake to a Ballarat man for $100. Normally these snakes sell for about $600. Mr. Harding was later told by Vida that he'd found the snake dead and discarded the body.

However, the snake world is not all that big and luck had it that Harding later found out the snake had been sold to the Ballarat keeper. More than a year later (November 1999), Harding and his snake were reunited again. Meanwhile Vida had pleaded guilty to charges relating to the illegal on-selling of the snake. Vida justified his actions of lying and on-selling the snake for a quick profit by saying that he didn't think that Harding had been looking after his snake properly.

Mick and Mip Part Two

Mick and Mip Pugh (see earlier) were busted by the same wildlife department officials on 24 January 2003 for having more illegally obtained exotic (non-native) snakes. The officials seized some corn snakes (*Elaphe g. guttata*) and some trinket snakes (*Elaphe helena*) from their Breakwater home. They were then charged with having illegally held exotic fauna.

But this time the story was slightly different, the reason being that these snakes had different origins. You see the Pughs had held these snakes for some years, these ones having been brought in by someone else and the Pughs had in fact been authorized some years earlier by the department's own officials to have them at their property. The paperwork and correspondence between the Pughs and the department proved this. However, in the hurly burly of a major armed raid involving at least ten heavily weaponed police, officials from several departments and the like, everything gets confused and the snakes were taken by mistake.

Actually the sequence of events went more or less as follows: The scene at the house was pure pandemonium. Guns being shoved in people's faces and men in suits running around like headless chickens. You'd have thought that some kind of terrorist cell or perhaps Osama Bin Laden himself had been ambushed. As the house was being trashed and cages being opened, shut, opened, shut, opened shut, opened, shut, opened shut . . . er, I assume you get the drift, one of the blokes grabbed a bag and shot through with the snakes. No seizure receipt as required by law, nothing. In fact most of the other government people around had no idea that one of their own had made off with several snakes!

The upshot of this is the same as for every other raid. The Pughs were charged. They were charged with having unlicensed fauna (not smuggling this time). The charge is essential or else the department would themselves be liable for a compensation claim for bungling a raid. For that reason, each and every raid on every person or property must result in charges. Governments and their employees never want to be liable for their errors.

The charges against the Pughs (Mip charged this time) have not been heard as of early 2003 and aren't likely to be settled for some time.

The Real Reason for the Raid?

Unlike corrupt bureaucrats and equally corrupt Supreme Court judges, I do not make pretense of having the ability to read minds. I can't. I can however speculate as to why the Pughs fell out with the Victorian Wildlife bureaucrats so much as to get a heavy duty military-style raid on their place.
At the time DNR officials caught Mick and Mip bringing in reptiles from overseas, they offered the Pughs a deal.
That was that the officials would go light on the Pughs so long as they became informants for them.

The deal was that the Pughs would dob in (turn in) their mates for all sorts of violations and in return be allowed a free rein to do what they want and keep what they want. The Pughs were guaranteed anonymity via an "informant number" and other means. The same sort of actions by wildlife officers and police are detailed in my various corruption books, including *Smuggled-2* and *Victoria Police Corruption* and so the Pugh case is not unique.

Now I'm offside with half the Australian bureaucracy already, so there was probably no love lost when I spilled the beans on what is in reality a well known system. It's called the "informant system." It also operates in the United States and in theory is a means by which enforcement officers can penetrate the criminal underworld. The reality is that the informant system is usually a lazy way of gathering information and intelligence to enable easy busts so that the officials can then spend most of their work hours lazing around, playing golf and the like.

The whole thing is covered up at the time of the busts when they say things like "Today's bust is the culmination of six-month's intensive investigation," when in reality it was probably the result of one man putting in his mate in return for not being prosecuted himself.

Now in terms of the Pughs and the wildlife authorities, the informant game didn't quite run according to plan. First the Pughs taped the officials making the offers. That wasn't a good start as it immediately turned the tables somewhat. Instead of the officials having something on the Pughs, it was actually the reverse.

The bombshell was dropped in late 2002 when in an edito-

rial in *Crocodilian - Journal of the Victorian Association of Amateur Herpetologists* 4(1):3-4, Mick published the details of what the wildlife officials had sought. Word got around that the DNR officials were "ropeable" and were just itching to retaliate. Hence the later raid!

Money, Money, Money

Some people may say I'm a bit harsh getting stuck into a department that's always been favorable to me. Yes, it's true, the Victorian Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has always been reasonable and up front when dealing with me, er well, as much as can be expected from a government bureaucracy. They've issued all manner of licenses and permits as required and sought, and been up front in terms of what they will and won't allow. Although sometimes their advice has been contradictory and inconsistent, they've always been friendly and reasonable to deal with.

Such as the advice, "If you get a Pilbara adder, we'll seize it!" I liked that. At least I knew where I stood and so at the moment, I'm happy not having *Acanthophis wellsei* (even though plenty of other Australians do). I have no doubt we'll cross the legal hurdles there in a few years when greater numbers are bred in other states and the Victorian officials will be badgered into letting them into this state.

Or for example the time in early 2002 that they dropped a bombshell and told me that I had an illegally held death adder. Now for someone as paranoid as I about dotting my "i"s and crossing my "t"s, that was like being told I had AIDS. But I wasn't raided or anything and I should tell you the whole story.

It came out when I applied for a permit to import three female death adders (*Acanthophis antarcticus*) from New South Wales to match-up with my male. At the present time, import/export permits from Victoria to NSW are routine and straightforward. Anyway, after I filled in my application an official from the Victorian wildlife department rang me and told me that I didn't have a license to keep snakes as a private keeper. This sounded strange to me as I'd had a license continuously for many years prior and had been filing my "returns" as per the rules without incident. Now why would a department happily accept and file my returns if I wasn't licensed?

Anyway, I was told "Oh, we've upgraded the computer system recently and obviously never sent you a renewal form and hence you never paid and hence you are not licensed." When I asked if that meant that I had an illegal death adder at my home and if they'd seize it, the woman on the phone said "Oh, no, it's obviously an honest mistake caused by both sides, so if you send us some money for the permit, we'll bank it and fix up the records."

The check was in the post seconds after I hung up the phone. Sure enough all was fixed up, the license sent out to me (new license and license number) and so too was the import/export permit.

A month later I got another letter from the same department. This one was a refund check for paying my license fees twice! Wow, it's a great computer they have in that department. But what I'm trying to get to is the following. Just because I haven't (yet?) been burnt by the Victorian wildlife officials won't stop me from telling people when they do get things wrong. Otherwise I'd be censoring the truth and for me that's never acceptable.

Money, Money, Money, Part Two

Anyway there is another possible reason as to why the Victorian Wildlife Department has such a crappy and mismanaged computer system. It may have something to do with the vast amounts of money they spend on name changes. In *Smuggled* and *Smuggled-2* I made reference to the many name changes this department's had. Each name change blows millions of dollars in new signage, stationary, logos and the like.
For example just think how much it'd cost to respray new names on several hundred late-model cars! And sure enough 2002 saw another multimillion dollar name change. This time the department's name changed from Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE)!

Previous names?

Well, in the last decade, they've been known as: Department of Natural Resources and Environment (DNRE); Department of Conservation and Environment (DCE); Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR); Conservation and Environment Department (C and E); Conservation and Natural Resources (CNR); and National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWSV).

Funnily enough, in private conversations most of the bureaucrats in the department reckon my criticisms of them have been spot on! But don't expect too many to go public on this. Their jobs are worth more.

A Good Move

Here's one for the Vic DSE or whatever they're called this week. I've been against the willy-nilly releasing of herps into the bush. This includes the so-called nuisance snakes that turn up in people's back yards and the like. The DSE say the snakes must be released, that's the law, and so that's what I and the other "snake rescuers" do. But for those of you who read my 1995 paper, "Release into Hell," you'd know that by and large I'm against this. The released reptiles rarely survive, transmit disease and cause havoc with gene pools, taxonomists and so on. Put simply, it's a waste of a good resource.

Anyway, DSE heard my call and partially funded a study by university student Heath Butler into what actually happens with translocated snakes in Melbourne. Based on tiger snakes (*Notechis scutatus*) "rescued" by myself and others he's hoping to find out how many actually survive when they are released and how they interact with other snakes in the areas they're released into.

Now just think how many other useful studies could be

funded if the DNR had stayed as DNR instead of becoming DSE! As a postscript, I should note that the snakes removed from properties here in Melbourne, Victoria, are effectively only tigers (*Notechis scutatus*), copperheads (*Austrelaps superbus*) and brown snakes (*Pseudonaja textilis*) and two small species of venomous snake. All of these are common in herpetoculture here and literally can't be given away when bred. However the results of the Heath Butler study may have a greater impact in other parts of Australia where species "rescued" include sought-after types like pythons. In all other Australian states, snake "rescuers" must also release their snakes. The only exception is the Northern Territory, where just one license has been issued for the whole of Darwin. Species caught may be onsold to keepers and dealers in the southern states.

Enemies

Mine are usually corrupt bureaucrats and the like who have a chronic fear of the truth. As an update for readers here who have read earlier articles and books of mine I should make a few recent events known.

Three more defamation writs have been fought off. One related to the book *Smuggled-2*, so to that extent this section of the article is herp-related. That defamation writ was the fourth case involving Vacik distributors. Then there was a pair of writs by a coalition of corrupt police, a State Ombudsman and a convicted arsonist and extortionist by the name of Adam Anthony Zoccoli, who was trying to ban my book *Victoria Police Corruption*.

That book precipitated the upset election loss of the Victorian State Government in September 1999, as well as mass resignations by senior police, including the commissioner himself, two years ahead of the end of his five-year contract. We offered the same defense in all cases. That was "truth" and "public interest," and like I said, our side won every case.

Then there was my improper imprisonment in 1997, fraudulently held up by my adversaries as "proof" of my innate criminality. In a radical turnaround, the Victorian Office of Public Prosecutions (OPP) lodged a letter with the High Court admitting to unlawfully rigging the trial to force my imprisonment. The letter followed a belated admission by chief crown witness John Raymond Connell that he had conspired with Terry O'Keefe and David Robby of the local transport department (Vicroads) to fabricate evidence and documents in order to convict me of four offenses I hadn't committed.

So far so good, but the OPP then went and said that they were not interested in paying out compensation for fear of setting a precedent.

So what does all this mean to you the reader?

So far no person or law court have yet been able to find a single word in any of my seven corruption books (including the two *Smuggled* books) that are in any way false or incorrect. But truth really is stranger than fiction and here's some further proof. Up until the end of 2000, government officials had tried to ban my corruption books on the alleged basis that they were untrue and therefore the legal arguments were along the lines of "the public shouldn't be told lies."

If the government officials had been correct in their assertions, then you can actually see a bit of logic in their arguments. But as I've said before, they never even got to be able to satisfy their own appointed judges that a single word I'd ever printed was wrong.

So at end 2000 in an amazing turnaround, the NSW Police decided to try to ban one of my books (*Taxi*) on the basis that it was true. That's not a misprint. The inappropriately named NSW Police Integrity Commission (PIC) actually wrote to the publishers seeking to ban sales of the book *Taxi - Indecent Exposures* because it was true.

The letter dated 10 November 2000, relied on an arcane legal precedent to argue that the public had no right to know the facts about government corruption matters. That's right, the public had no right to be able to find out the truth. In terms of my books, it meant that the government side had now attempted to ban six in a row! We took legal advice from a Sydney lawyer and he told the NSW Police to get back to policing—not plumbing.

But Please Don't Make it Common

Getting to the herp scene, perhaps I should mention Dale Gibbons. I like to think he owns the Bendigo Hilton hotel. Actually he doesn't, but when in Bendigo in rural Victoria, I stay at his place. I like the snake room. Why? It's the warmest place in the house.

He's a highly respected herpetologist who has also been doing field research with DNR scientists on Victorian carpet snakes at Wangaratta and other areas. That part is the good bit. Any money the department spends on research on reptiles in the field is probably far better than the vastly greater amounts spent on useless consultancies and the like.

But a few years ago in the mid 1990s Dale actually came a cropper with the local wildlife department. That was because he did the unspeakable and almost made a "rare" animal "common."

Rare animals are a great propaganda piece for wildlife authorities. The departments flash their images around the place and tell the general public that without the department's bureaucracy, these species would be even rarer or "God forbid" extinct. It's a simple line and most people unthinkingly buy it.

Now so long as these species remain rare, the departments can continue to get government money and power and so their existence is justified. If these species were to suddenly become common, then the main reason for these departments to exist is gone and hence in reality this must never happen. Jobs are at stake!

In an Australian context there are at most about 300 species of vertebrates (mammals, birds, reptiles, frogs, fish) that could be classed as endangered. And quite frankly with the expenditure of a pitifully small amount of money (less than 100

million dollars) and half-sensible wildlife laws, all bar a few marine and other species could be placed out of danger within a few years. And that's in the context of billions spent in this country each year ostensibly on conservation. Now the numbers don't add up, and they aren't meant to. That's what I mean about self-serving bureaucracies.

Enter Dale Gibbons again. Okay, so he bred Bredl's pythons (*Morelia bredli*) and made them a common captive here in Australia. That wasn't a problem for the local officials as that's a Northern Territory native, and that's a different state. But one day when he was out studying powerful owls (*Ninox strenua*) along a roadside near Bendigo he stumbled upon a series of huge populations of the striped legless lizard (*Delma impar*). Now these are supposed to critically endangered and Dale's find seemed to indicate that they were somewhat more common and widespread than was thought. Instead of embracing the find as scientifically useful for the conservation of the species, Dale was told, "Keep your mouth shut." You see, the department wanted to use the supposedly critically endangered status of the species as a propaganda piece to justify the continued existence of a sizeable part of the bureaucracy. But what exactly did this bureaucracy do for the benefit of the supposedly critically endangered reptile? In two or less words the bureaucracy did effectively nothing.

South Australia NPWS's Continued Self Justification

Ditto the above for South Australia. The rediscovery of the Adelaide bluetongue (*Tiliqua adelaidensis*) near Burra in South Australia in 1992 was a boon for the South Australian wildlife department. The lizard was thought to be extinct and until 1992 was only known from about seven specimens stored in museum jars. The rediscovery of the species gave the wildlife department a great propaganda piece with which to justify their ever-growing budgets and continued existence.

Now the South Australian NPWS were onto the lizard's case real quick. Just to make sure that the species didn't dare become common, they made sure that none entered captivity, save for a select few specimens that ended up at the SA Museum and the zoo. The importance here was that none ended up in the hands of private keepers who may dare to do the unspeakable and breed the animals in such numbers that they became "common."

The NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service tried to do the same thing with the green and golden bell frog (*Litoria aurea*), as soon as they realized that the frogs were in serious decline and thought that only a few hundred may be left in the wild in that state.

However, because they breed like er, bell frogs in captivity, the plan didn't succeed when South Australians who were able to keep the frogs legally decided to go hard on the captive breeding. With an average of 1,500 eggs per mating, it didn't take long for this supposedly endangered frog to become dirt common in captivity.

And so the NSW NPWS spent hundreds of thousands of dollars in the late 1990s paying their own "scientists" to count the supposedly last remaining members of that species, but at the same time do nothing to breed or preserve the species. In NSW at least keeping bell frogs was strictly prohibited—lest the unthinkable happen and the species actually become common again. Put simply it was one colossal rort.

The farcical nature of these so-called studies became clear when captive breeders, pet-shops and the like in South Australia and Victoria ended up bursting at the seams with this supposedly endangered frog. The money spent supposedly counting what were supposedly the last remaining bell frogs could have been far better spent elsewhere.

Getting back to the Adelaide bluetongue and the SA NPWS and their reasons to keep the lizards rare, one mustn't forget the propaganda side of things. To keep up the charade that the SA NPWS are trying to boost the numbers of the species, they have a few specimens at the local government owned zoo. They'll breed a few token lizards just so that they can claim to be running a breeding program to "save" the endangered species. In reality, the effort is too little to make any real impact, but it helps perpetuate the charade that the department and the government are on the lizard's side.

Now we are at the turn of the millennium and Adelaide bluetongues have turned up elsewhere. According to the newsletters of the South Australian Herpetology Group, at least ten other locations to be exact. The wild population is now known to be in the thousands. Because they are known to inhabit spider burrows, people are in tune with where to look for the lizards. Localities they are now known from include private properties in the mid-north in a line from just south of Burra north towards Peterborough and the South Hummocks Range, north of Port Wakefield, as well as a property between Clare and Blyth. But of course, the idea that private keepers be allowed to keep or breed the species remains a big "no-no."

Are the Adelaide bluetongues hard to breed? Based on the fact that all the other species breed like, er, bluetongues, I'd say not likely. But that of course is an even greater reason why the SA NPWS don't want private keepers to get hold of this "critically endangered species." Like I said, if the private keepers start to breed them by the thousand, another reason for the SA NPWS to scam the taxpayer for funds will evaporate. And if it ever became a simple choice between these lizards remaining rare and/or becoming extinct, or being bred by private keepers in huge numbers, thereby making them "common," I think I know which way the bureaucrats would probably go.

(*to be continued*)

Bull. Chicago Herp. Soc. 38(10):204-205, 2003

Book Review: *Lizards: A Natural History of Some Uncommon Creatures—Extraordinary Chameleons, Iguanas, Geckos, & More* by David Badger (photography by John Netherton). 2002. Voyageur Press, Inc., Stillwater, Minnesota. 160 pp. Cloth. ISBN 0-89658-520-4. $35*

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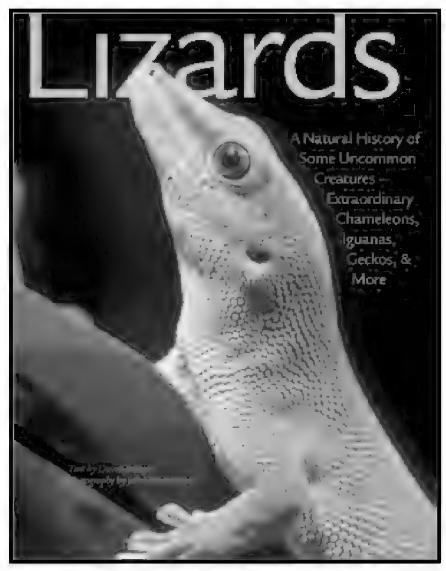

This "coffee-table" tome is "nontechnical in nature" and "designed for general readers." For the most part, those goals, stated by the author in the introduction, are achieved. The book is attractive and entertaining. Sadly, however, opportunities to educate readers whose attention is caught initially by the abundance of largely spectacular images will leave all but the most uninformed wishing for more.

After a dedication to John Netherton, who passed away just two weeks after completing the photography for this volume, a brief introduction precedes profusely illustrated chapters on "Lizards and Humans," "Physical Characteristics and Behavior," "Families and Species," and "Lizard Conservation." A bibliography of mostly general works and an index follow.

Because most books that deal with reptiles include information on structure and function and classification, I was drawn first to the chapters on interactions with humans and conservation—the latter in particular, because lizard conservation usually receives little attention after the needs of amphibians, sea turtles, crocodilians, and the "charismatic megafauna, such as pandas, tigers, and whales," are addressed. The author effectively engages his readers by readily convincing them that lizards are in much more precarious situations than most of us realize. He then goes on to list the primary threats: habitat destruction and degradation, introduction of invasive species, pollution, disease and parasites, unsustainable harvesting, and climate change—a list seemingly taken directly from any one of many published works on amphibian declines. Although he subsequently discusses each threat, he does so in such general terms that he could be talking about the plight of any animal. I was particularly interested in hearing of potential effects of climate change specifically on lizards, but none was offered. Only one specific example of any threat is cited (the depredation on native lizards by brown tree snakes on Guam), thus missing a prime opportunity to educate an interested segment of the public of the many instances in which human activity has negatively impacted particular species and, in the process, alerting them to opportunities to support conservation efforts. To the author's credit, however, he does list several organizations that are actively engaged in conservation of amphibians and reptiles, but mentions only a few specific instances of species recovery plans. By far the most extensive and potentially valuable section of this chapter lists reasons why lizards are important and why their conservation should be of concern to individuals and policy-makers. He ends the very short chapter (three printed pages) with an admonition to educate the public, which was as effective as it was brief.

The chapter on "Lizards and Humans" begins with a quote from Clifford Pope suggesting that interest in lizards has never equaled that in snakes (kind of a reversal from the final chapter in *Snakes: Ecology and Behavior* entitled: "Summary: Future Research on Snakes, or How to Combat Lizard Envy"; Seigel, 1993). The author proceeds to discuss the roles of lizards in folklore (i.e., dragons), film (where they have doubled as dinosaurs), literature, and popular culture (where their major role seems to have been to inspire the names of many musical groups). Myths and traditions of many cultures have involved lizards, often in central roles, and many of the accounts are of sufficient interest to spark further inquiry. The author also discusses lizards as food and sources of other marketable products such as oil, skins, and tonics with supposed medicinal or aphrodisiac properties. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of lizards as pets, noting both the admirable qualities of some and the problems that accrue through lack of knowledge, actual abuses, or misguided efforts to keep those species totally unsuitable as pets.

The section on morphology and behavior begins with a casual survey of the many accoutrements borne by lizards and extremes in body sizes ranging from Komodo dragons to dwarf geckos. Skin and color are covered next, with an emphasis on shedding and the role of color in communication and crypsis. The author lists the principal factors affecting color: age, gender, environment, season, temperature, health, and light intensity—and then proceeds to differentiate between voluntary and involuntary changes in color. He concludes with statements relating color to state of mind or attitude, which was not among the reasons listed in the previous paragraph. Subsequent details expand on specific effects of various factors, emphasizing conditions and responses observed in captive animals.

Locomotion is covered next, with mandatory sections addressing the most spectacular aspects of lizard movement: top speeds of the world's swiftest lizards (six-lined racerunners @ 18 mph), gliding, running on water, adhesion to vertical surfaces, and the grasping ability of true chameleons. Although limblessness is mentioned elsewhere, no discussion of

the advantages thereof is included, nor are "normal" lizard locomotion and more esoteric but important factors such as limb orientation addressed at all.

The next sections deal with sensory perception, again concentrating on the unusual or spectacular: acuity, color vision, "brows" and "lashes," transparent windows in lids, features of eyes of nocturnally active forms, chameleons' independently moving orbits, vocalization, hearing, role of the tongue and Jacobson's organ in chemoreception, and, digressing slightly from the focus on senses, chameleons' "popgun" tongues. Unfortunately, detail is lacking in most instances, the conditions pertaining to most lizards ignored or mentioned only casually, and, overlooking a great opportunity to delve into the real intricacies of structure and function, the obvious question of just how a chameleon extends its tongue so far and so accurately is lost in amazement over its speed.

Teeth and venom are discussed in cursory fashion, and the role of dentition in defining relationships among some lizard groups is omitted altogether. Although similarly brief, a survey of the roles of tails and the nature of autotomy is much more complete. Subsequent sections on internal anatomy and thermoregulation (with brief mention of drinking or lack thereof, but no discussion of osmoregulation) are quite condensed. Reproduction is covered in somewhat more detail, and aspects and examples of courtship, fertilization, viviparity (although no satisfactory distinction is made between it and "ovoviviparity"), communal nesting, temperature dependent sex determination, and parthenogenesis are included. Discussion of communication once again is most cursory, briefly touching upon vocalization, visual displays, and chemical secretions, but with little attention to species specificity beyond a casual mention of suspicions that movements associated with visual displays are ancestral traits. Coverage of defense strategies is similarly brief, but more satisfying in that it at least touches upon the variety of options employed by various lizards. The concluding sections on predation and hibernation revert to the overly superficial.

In the chapter entitled "families and species," familial relationships are limited to a single statement that twenty-four are recognized, ignoring the opportunity to provide even the most basic lesson in systematics—in spite of the fact that names and relationships seem to be fascinating topics to even the most naï ve neophyte, much less to the more ardent sauriophile who has made an effort to learn scientific names and begin to understand the complexities of taxonomy.

The next 40+ pages are devoted to a survey of selected species: four chameleons, two anoles, five geckos, two skinks, the Gila monster, a legless anguid, a horned lizard, the eastern collared lizard, a teiid, two spiny lizards, lava lizards, four iguanas, and four monitors. Nowhere does the author provide an explanation for his selection, nor is any mention made of the many missing species (I'm guessing that the selection was predicated by the availability of suitably spectacular photographs). Each account provides a brief description, vague indications of distribution, and interesting facts that emphasize the unusual.

I'm well aware that my review carries a distinctly negative overtone. That may largely reflect my vocation as an educator and my frustration in seeing missed a great opportunity to provide more insights than the author chose to include. The book ultimately succeeds in meeting its rather modest goals of providing images and information to the general reader. If one is seeking to decorate a coffee table, unwilling to be challenged, and satisfied with being entertained and even awed by the photography, the book is well worth the retail price; if one is seeking to learn more about lizards, look elsewhere.

HerPET-POURRI

by Ellin Beltz

Things don't go better with coqui

Nine hundred gallons of citric acid and a team of state and federal workers with 100-gallon motorized sprayers will head to the Hawaiian hills in an effort to eradicate the only wild colony of coqui frogs on O'ahu. Officials hope to avoid the situation which has developed on the Big Island. In 1999, the first coqui were reported from five locations. Now, more than 200 localities are known; and the frog has 40 localities on Maui and one on Kaua'i. Workers on O'ahu handpicked hundreds of frogs in February. But not all were caught, and eggs hatched, raising the total in the population to more than a hundred. [*Honolulu Advertiser*, September 7, 2003, from Ms. G. E. Chow]

Fangs for the memories?

"President Bush came face to face with a rattlesnake Friday [in the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area] but that encounter was friendly compared to the biting criticism from environmentalists upset with his stewardship of the national park system. . . . Bush and Interior Secretary Gale Norton encountered the snake as they walked down a dirt trail on the way out. . . . Bush, accustomed to rattlesnakes at his Texas ranch leaned over to get a better look at the reptile." Environmentalists are upset that money for maintenance is being diverted from the Parks system. [*Miami Herald*, August 16, 2003, from Alan Rigerman]

Or just par for the course?

Copperheads, while venomous, are not very aggressive according to a graduate student's studies. In the most recent study, "most of the snakes even when poked on the head 3 times, did little to respond. Out of 620 snakes studied, only about 50 struck," according to the *Miami Herald*. The researcher said, "One conclusion I can make from my studies is you would be amazed at how hard it is to get a snake to strike you. If a snake gets you, there's a large probability you are doing everything for that to happen." [July 6, 2003, from Alan Rigerman]

Amphibians continue decline on all continents

• New Zealand's native frog populations are so low that researchers can't be sure if that's a natural condition or one caused by recent die offs. The chytrid fungus has been identified in New Zealand, but perhaps a greater danger comes from common mosquito fish, *Gambusia* sp. Mosquito fish eat frog eggs, small tadpoles and even tadpoles their own size by nibbling at the tadpoles' tails. Mosquito fish have been widely introduced around the world. Meanwhile 15 species of frogs have disappeared entirely from Australia. [*MOKO*, newsletter of the New Zealand Herpetological Society, June 2003]

• Ranavirus has been implicated in unexpected and catastrophic die offs of tadpoles and young frogs. The first reports of the virus from Ontario have sparked a request for information about any dead tadpole or juvenile frogs found in Ontario. You can visit http://www.trentu.ca/biology/tadpoles/welcome.htm for more information or to make a report online. [*Amphibian Voice* 13:1, Spring 2003, from Bob Johnson]

• Australian researchers have developed a mix of water and salts in which they wash frogs for 15 minutes after which the solution can be tested to reveal the presence or absence of chytrid fungus. "The chytrid fungus (*Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis*) may have already contributed to the extinction of six frog species in Australia. It first appeared there in 1993; now more than 30 species carry the disease, including seven under threat. The fungus also infects toads and salamanders in New Zealand, the United States, South America and Europe. [Nature News Service, *MOKO*, February 2003]

Tortoise T&H

Under a broiling sun west of Las Vegas, two miles of chain-link plus barbed wire fencing encloses 222 acres for desert tortoise refugees of Nevada's relentless growth. Up to 1,500 desert tortoises can be studied, tagged and maintained while awaiting release into areas not yet developed, churned or paved. Since 1997, the Desert Tortoise Transfer and Holding Facility has released more than 4,500 back into the wild and has been so successful that new areas for release are being studied. The facility is funded by a builders' fee; $500 for every acre developed. [*Honolulu Star Bulletin*, June 29, 2003, from Ms. G. E. Chow]

Had to happen someday

Ever since Dave Barry, the syndicated columnist, moved to Florida I have been waiting for the following story to occur to him. He was busy working at his computer screen when he grabbed a live snake instead of the drink can he had been trying to pick up. He ran into the kitchen, grabbed his barbecue tongs, grabbed the snake, ran outside, dropped the tongs and the snake. The confused reptile slithered into Barry's swimming pool. Barry chased it around the pool, trying to grab it with the tongs. Finally the snake was cornered in the filter basket, removed from the pool and dumped in the shrubbery. Where it probably still lives, "lurking, and now [he's] a nervous wreck, wondering how it got into the house and where it will show up next. I'm also exhausted. You try sleeping with barbecue tongs. Dave Barry" [*Eureka Times-Standard*, July 6, 2003, from Bradford Norman]

Deja vu for the umpteenth time

• A woman with her two grandchildren found two tiny turtles while walking along a beach next to the sea in Florida. Even with all those clues, it never occurred to the grandmother that these tiny turtles might be sea turtles, let alone potentially 400 pound loggerhead sea turtles. So she permitted the children to take the turtles with them in a plastic bag all the way from Florida to the upper Midwest. She kept one, but when the grandchildren brought their turtle home to Indianapolis, their mother called officials for help. She did the right thing. The turtles are being cared for by the Shedd Aquarium in Chicago and the Indianapolis Zoo. They will be encouraged to grow a

little and eventually released. [*Chicago Tribune*, August 3, 2003, from Ray Boldt]

• A 38-year-old man faces 15 years in prison and a $750,000 fine if convicted of smuggling dozens of protected animals into the United States. In January, 198 Fly River turtles, 25 Indian star tortoises and three monitor lizards were shipped into the U.S. in a box labeled books. The man, a native of Singapore, was arrested in June when he came into the U.S. [*Miami Herald*, July 31, 2003, from Alan Rigerman]

• Key Biscayne gardeners are upset because a tribe of iguanas has taken to chomping the local flower beds and lawns. The animals are probably released pets; the *Miami Herald* now calls them a "Godzilla-sized problem." One park manager suspects that his local flock of spiny-tailed iguanas is eating peacock hatchlings as well as his prettiest exotic plants. "South Florida has had a small population of wild iguanas for many years, but it's only in recent years that their numbers have grown out of control and their diet has expanded. So far, plant lovers have not found an effective way to stop them," reports the *Herald*. [August 1, 2003, from Alan Rigerman]

Some odds: 1/1000 or .001

• "Biologists estimate that just one of every 1,000 eggs laid survives to become an adult [sea] turtle," according to the *Orlando Sentinel*, which adds "About 90 percent of the nesting in the United States takes place on the east coast of Florida. . . . Last year, 62,905 loggerhead turtles nested in 27 coastal counties in Florida." The primary consumers of sea turtle eggs are natural predators, natural causes and egg poachers. "Active black markets for the eggs—one in Riviera Beach and another . . . in West Palm Beach" have sprung up. A state law that took effect on July 1 stipulates that egg poachers who have 12 or more eggs will be charged with a felony with penalties up to five years in prison and a $5,000 fine. Catching the poachers, however, is rare, even though officers have night vision goggles and other high tech goodies. [July 27, 2003, from Bill Burnett]

• A $1,000 bounty has been offered for information relating to the theft of loggerhead sea turtles from nests on the Marquesas, a remote chain of islands off Key West. The recent egg snatching was discovered by a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist during routine turtle nesting surveys who said, "I have walked these beaches for 18 years. It was like a guy doing brain surgery with a hatchet." [*Miami Herald*, July 13, 2003, from Alan Rigerman]

• Since the egg market is based on a mistaken belief that the eggs have aphrodisiac powers, and after watching the bush-aphrodisiac market in China dry up as Viagra became widely available, perhaps herpetologists should sponsor Viagra billboards. The slogan perhaps, "Don't be a yolk-el, take the blue!"

• A 69-year-old man on St. Croix, Virgin Islands, has been sentenced to one year of probation for taking 13 hawksbill sea turtle eggs. The Virgin Islands *Daily News* reports "Sea turtles once were so common in the Caribbean that Christopher Columbus recorded in his journal that he thought his ship had run aground on shoals when, in fact, sea turtles were bouncing off the hulls." [July 22, 2003, from Ms. G. E. Chow]

Expensive supper

More than 10,000 endangered turtles and tortoises from Malaysia were destined for Chinese dining tables until they were seized by customs agents in Hong Kong. They were packed in a container labeled watermelons. Only four were alive when discovered. Officials estimate the turtles were worth about US$17 apiece. [*Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, July 11, 2003, from Bill Burnett]

Wildlife monitors

"A colony of 6-foot-long Nile monitor lizards discovered breeding in Cape Coral [Florida] canals is already spreading north and state wildlife experts say that there's nothing to stop them from eventually living all over the state." Florida's wildlife laws do not cover exotic species, so anyone in the state can engage in "snaring or spearing one or a dozen," according to the Orlando Sentinel. The first one was reported in 1990, there have been 200 reports since then. Experts estimate the total population may number in the thousands. Monitors can eat mammals, insects and mollusks as well as native species' eggs. The city biologist of Cape Coral said that "the number of stray cats has dropped off in certain areas." [July 24, 2003, from Bill Burnett]

Give ` em some Gator-aid

How do you tell the difference between a crocodile and an alligator? (1) Gators have wide snouts, (2) their top teeth overlap their lower teeth, (3) you can't see their teeth when their mouths are closed, (4) they have webbing on all four feet and (5) they are the mascot of the University of Florida football team. Unfortunately for that school, 19,200 copies of its 348-page media guide for the football team were printed with a crocodile on the cover instead of an alligator. To add insult to injury, the University of Florida has one of the best crocodilian lineups in their biology department; any one of whom would have instantly noticed the mistake if sports and media had bothered to check. The mistake was noticed quickly. There are more than 1.5 million real alligators in the state, after all. [July 31, 2003; *USA Today* and *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, from Bill Burnett]

Record holder

At 100 pounds per foot, a 20-foot, 2-ton saltwater crocodile that was shipped to Florida's Parrot Jungle Island from Thailand is reported to be the largest one in captivity in the U.S. [*Miami Herald*, September 3, 2003, from Alan Rigerman]

Deliberate fire gets out of hand

Rat hunters in Mozambique routinely set fires to drive rats into trap. However, a rat fire has blackened half of the 1,456-square-mile Gorongosa National Park. Large mammals including elephants, lions, leopards, and zebras were forced to flee into more populated areas. The park was founded in 1921, became a battlefield during a 16-year civil war which ended in 1992, provided a haven for poachers and only lately has been restored with help from the international banking

community. [*Chicago Tribune*, September 10, 2003, from Ray Boldt] The effects on reptiles and amphibians are unmentioned, but probably considerable.

Chillin' in Florida

Strong onshore winds caused an upwelling of cold ocean waters along Florida's Atlantic coast and also was tough on newly hatched sea turtles. More than 1,000 babies were treated for hypothermia and released in warmer waters of the Gulf Stream. The temperature has been about 20°F lower than usual. [*Honolulu Advertiser*, August 17, 2003, from Ms. G. E. Chow]

Gator hunting, 2003

• A class in Tampa on how to hunt an alligator was protested by about 20 animal rights activists. The annual gator season runs from September 1 to October 8. Hunters have to apply for a $270 permit which are issued by lottery. [*Miami Herald*, August 4, 2003, from Alan Rigerman]

• Gator hunters in Florida are actually going out at night to hunt alligators without guns. Hunters can only use hand-held harpoons, snatch hooks and manually operated spears, speargunns, crossbows and the old standby, bows and arrows. The state plans to issue permits to about 2,300 people to take no more than two alligators each. The hunts are not a population control program but a way to for the public to make use of this renewable resource, according to an alligator management biologist. Animal rights activists oppose the hunt because of the "barbaric methods," according to one activist. [*Miami Herald*, September 1, 2003, from Alan Rigerman]

Dinosaurs and Expeditions, continued

CHS members, Paul Sereno and Gabe Lyon left for Niger, Africa, in early September with plans to explore "Africa's last surviving dinosaurs," according to the Project Exploration newsletter. This summer, the Junior Paleontologists explored an egg-site and later this year a new dinosaur exhibit will open at Garfield Park Conservatory. [Project Exploration newsletter, Fall 2003, from Marco Mendez]

CHS members may lose pets

Regular readers of the *Bulletin* are aware that a proposal to ban exotic pets in Chicago is not particularly popular with folks who own iguanas, ball pythons, boa constrictors, monitor lizards and snakes with Duvernoy glands, including the common garter snake. The ordinance was put forward in response to recent monkey-pox fears. However, none of the herpetological animals listed are carriers of monkey pox and it is to be presumed they were included on the list for fear of salmonella or merely from reptile phobia. Illinois already has some of the toughest laws about herps in the U.S. If the ordinance passes, the Chicago Herp Society will no longer be able to do reptile education programs at schools, museums and ReptileFest. If you live in Chicago, now would be a great time to write your alderman a good-old fashioned paper variety letter expressing your opinion. E-mails seem to vanish in City Hall and just dropping in their office is not enough to influence opinion. [*Chicago Sun-Times*, August 9, 2003, from Ray Boldt]

Thanks to everyone who contributed recently and to Ray Boldt, Ms. G. E. Chow, Jim Buskirk, Alan Rigerman, Mrs. P. L. Beltz, Eloise Mason, K. S. Mierzwa and Wes von Papineau for stuff they sent which I enjoyed reading but couldn't summarize for this column. You can (and really could) contribute, too. Take whole pages of newspapers or magazines, leave the publication slugs up there in the corners and put your name on each piece. Those little labels they keep sending us in junk mail are great for this task. Fold a minimum of times and mail to: Ellin Beltz, POB 934, Ferndale, CA 95536, or E-mail me ebeltz@ebeltz.net.

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Unofficial Minutes of the CHS Board Meeting, September 12, 2003

Lori King called the meeting to order at 7:37 P.M. All board members were present.

Officers' Reports

Recording Secretary: Zoe Magierek read the minutes of the August 15 board meeting. The minutes were accepted as read.

Treasurer: Jim Hoffman presented an income statement and a balance sheet. There were two months of raffle and book sales included. Linda Malawy wondered if it was possible to get a copy of the treasurer's report before the board meeting. Jim said he could E-mail it in Excel. Mike Redmer asked how often we get paid by Amazon.com. Mike Dloogatch said it is quarterly if we make enough money; otherwise they hold it.

Membership Secretary: Membership will probably go up by a few for September but as of the board meeting there were not figures yet.

Vice-president: Several speakers at this year's IHS were recruited to come and speak for the CHS.

Corresponding Secretary: All recent phone calls have been about adoptions and were forwarded to Linda.

Standing Committees

Shows: The dates for next year's Chicagoland Pet Show at Arlington Park are March 13–15. Jenny Vollman said that next month, when we have the invoice, she would move to allocate the $600 needed for booth space. Ron Humbert said that Salamander Safari will be held on Saturday, March 27.

Raffle: We have about three months of raffle items remaining. Erik Williams will write letters to solicit more donations and Linda will speak with vendors at the HH Backer Trade Show in October. Jack Schoenfelder has a 30-gallon tank and some other nice things he is willing to bring in for larger attendance meetings.

General Meeting Sales:

Books: Joan did not have an inventory ready. Next month the financial structure of the book sales will be discussed with the accounting and inventory present.

Trout Chow and CHS Merchandise: Jack Schoenfelder mentioned having a holiday sale of herp-related gifts and books, as was done in the past. It was decided that it would be at the November meeting. An announcement will go in the *Bulletin* and it can be promoted at general meetings.

Chicago Wilderness: Tom Anton gave a talk on crayfish to the Oakbrook chapter of Trout Unlimited. The people involved in this organization seemed interested in a more hands-on, walking tour, which turned into a herp tour which will either be at McKinley Woods or the Little Vermilion River, probably on October 4. The exact time and place will be announced at the general meeting. Chicago Wilderness will hold their annual picnic September 28 at Humboldt Park.

Conservation: John Archer gave an inventory of available shirts. Lori King brought up getting the CHS more involved with the Turtle Survival Alliance. She mentioned possibly incorporating the TSA at our booth at the North American Reptile Breeders' show in Tinley Park as the massassauga project winds down. More information will be given to the board as it comes in.

Speakers' Bureau: Matt Campbell is a new member of the speakers' bureau committee.

Ad Hoc Committees

Nominating Committee: Chairman John Archer promised the slate will be ready soon, and will be E-mailed to Mike for the *Bulletin*, as well as E-mailed to all board members.

Annual Awards: The awards should be ordered by November 1. The most recent invoice in the treasurer's files was from 2000.

Old Business

State Reptile: Ron Humbert said that in the following weeks they would be meeting with teachers and congressmen. Now that school is back in session things are moving along as planned.

Grand Victoria Grant: Mike Redmer will revise the information and send in our request for a grant.

Proposed Animal Ban Ordinance: A committee, to which Lori King has been appointed, has been formed to rewrite the ordinance.

New Business

HerpDigest will give us a free four-line ad, if we give them a free ad in the *Bulletin* for HerpArts.com. Consensus of the board was to proceed with this exchange.

Mike Dloogatch mentioned that we need to move the exchange publications currently being stored in Gary Fogel's basement. Help will be needed in moving them.

Round Table

Jack Schoenfelder mentioned the "5-foot" alligator spotted in a Valparaiso pond, which upon capture was two feet long.

Darin Croft will be moving in October to Cleveland, where he will work at the Case Western–Cleveland Natural History Museum.

Lori King welcomed Matt Campbell to the speakers' bureau!

Jenny Vollman moved to adjourn; Erik Williams seconded. All in favor, the meeting adjourned at 9:12 P.M.

Respectfully submitted by Recording Secretary Zoe Magierek

Bull. Chicago Herp. Soc. 38(10):210-211, 2003

Herpetology 2003

In this column the editorial staff presents short abstracts of herpetological articles we have found of interest. This is not an attempt to summarize all of the research papers being published; it is an attempt to increase the reader's awareness of what herpetologists have been doing and publishing. The editor assumes full responsibility for any errors or misleading statements.

THE GENUS *EGERNIA*: ECOLOGY, LIFE-HISTORY AND BEHAVIOR

D. G. Chapple [2003, Herpetological Monographs 17:145-180] notes that squamate reptiles generally have been ignored in the search for a unified theory for the evolution of sociality due to the perception that they exhibit little social behavior beyond territoriality and dominance hierarchies and display polygynous mating systems. However a growing body of research has revealed unsuspected levels of social complexity and diversity in mating systems within the squamate lineage, particularly among the members of the Australian scincid genus *Egernia*. Several species of *Egernia* are amongst the most highly social of all squamate reptiles, exhibiting stable social aggregations and high levels of long-term social and genetic monogamy. Social complexity is widespread within the *Egernia* genus, with reports of social aggregations in 23 of the 30 described species. The purpose of this review was to examine the potential for the *Egernia* genus as a model system for study of the evolution of sociality and monogamy within squamate reptiles.

Current evidence indicates there is substantial variability in social complexity both within and between species, with social organization covering the spectrum from solitary to highly social. Four highly social *Egernia* species are known to live in stable social aggregations consisting of closely related individuals (adults, subadults, juveniles; i.e., family groups) that appear to utilize chemical cues to recognize group members (kin recognition). Enhanced vigilance against predators is one presumed benefit of group membership. Additionally, juveniles within social groupings appear to receive low levels of indirect parental care. Several *Egernia* species create scat piles that mark group territories. Three *Egernia* species exhibit long-term social and genetic monogamy and several inbreeding avoidance strategies have been documented. However, it is currently unknown whether monogamy is widespread within *Egernia*. *Egernia* species occupy a broad range of habitats, although most are terrestrial, saxicolous or semi-arboreal. Several species display an attachment to a permanent home site, generally a rock crevice, burrow or tree hollow. *Egernia* species take 25 years to mature, live for 5–25 years, and are viviparous with litter size positively correlated with body size. Several *Egernia* species are herbivorous, with the degree of herbivory increasing with body size and during ontogeny in larger species. Most smaller species are either insectivorous or omnivorous. Species of *Egernia* have a wide range of reptilian, avian, and mammalian predators. Several larger species possess several behavioral and morphological features to prevent their extraction from rock crevices, including highly modified keeled scales and numerous defensive behaviors. Color pattern polymorphism is present in five *Egernia* species.

Potential ecological correlates of sociality and monogamy are discussed. The life-history hypothesis predicts long-lived, late-maturing species should evolve complex sociality. The habitat availability hypothesis relies on the assumption that refugia may be limited in some ecological settings, and group formation is a consequence of co-habitation of available refugia. These hypotheses are not mutually exclusive, and testable predictions are formulated and discussed. Specific future research directions are outlined to take advantage of *Egernia* as a model system for comparative research on a lineage that represents an independent origin of social organization comparable to that found in birds and mammals.

CTENOSAURS IN FLORIDA

J. H. Townsend et al. [2003, Herpetozoa 16(1/2):67-72] note that two species of spiny-tailed iguanas or ctenosaurs, *Ctenosaura pectinata* and *C. similis*, have been introduced in Florida. Populations on Key Biscayne, Miami–Dade County, and Gasparilla Island, Charlotte and Lee counties, are reported to be *C. pectinata*. However, the status and distribution of *C. similis* are reported to be poorly known. After conducting herpetofaunal surveys since 1995 in areas known to contain ctenosaurs, as well as examining all known specimens in systematic collections, the authors found that most populations reported to be *C. pectinata* were *C. similis*. On the southeastern Florida coast, *C. similis* occurs on Key Biscayne and in Hialeah, Miami–Dade County, and in Davie, Broward County. On the southwestem Florida coast, *C. similis* occurs on Gasparilla Island and in adjacent areas, Lee and Charlotte counties, and on Keewaydin Island, Collier County. *Ctenosaura pectinata* occurs only along Old Cutler Road on the western side of Biscayne Bay, Miami–Dade County.

WOOD FROG OVERWINTERING

J. V. Regosin et al. [2003, J. Herpetology 37(2):390-394] note that few studies have systematically investigated the overwintering ecology of anurans. The authors used large-scale field enclosures to measure the winter densities of wood frogs (*Rana sylvatica*) in an upland deciduous forest adjacent to two breeding pools in eastern Massachusetts. Pitfall traps were operated continuously from March to December 2000. Wood frog densities ranged from 0 to 6.3 wood frogs/100 m^2 ($\bar{x}$ = 1.4, SD = 1.6, N = 17 enclosures) and declined as distance to the nearest breeding pond increased. The sex ratio of wood frogs wintering close (< 65 m) to the pond was more highly skewed toward males than the sex ratio of those wintering further from the pond (8:1 vs. 1.6:1). Adult wood frogs apparently only occupied this upland forest habitat during late fall and winter and did not use it during the summer active period. These results suggest that few wintering females may be protected within narrow regulatory buffers adjacent to breeding ponds and that the effects of habitat destruction on wood frog mortality may vary dramatically by season.

AMPHISBAENIAN SYSTEMATICS

M. Kearney [2003, Herpetological Monographs 17:1-74] notes that amphisbaenians are a poorly known group of squamate reptiles with over 150 extant species in 23 genera. They live almost exclusively under loose or sandy soil in tropical to temperate areas around the world, and their anatomy is modified in many ways related to this lifestyle. Most recent studies recognize four families within Amphisbaenia: Bipedidae, Amphisbaenidae, Trogonophidae and Rhineuridae. Only the Rhineuridae are well represented in the fossil record. Two exclusively fossil families, Hyporhinidae and Crythiosauridae, have also been recognized in some studies. In this paper, a phylogenetic study of the Amphisbaenia is presented based on morphological characters investigated in living and fossil forms. Amphisbaenian monophyly is supported, but the recent identification of the late Cretaceous *Sineoamphisbaena hextabularis* as a primitive amphisbaenian is not supported. The monophyly of two of the four families of extant amphisbaenians is upheld, with one family being more inclusive than previously thought. Amphisbaenidae is substantially revised, with several taxa previously included in the family being more closely related to rhineurids, and with *Blanus* representing a basal amphisbaenian. Rhineuridae is also revised to include the previously recognized fossil family Hyporhinidae. Trogonophidae is the sister-group to the remaining amphisbaenids, and together they form the sister-group to the expanded rhineurid clade. *Bipes* is the most basal amphisbaenian and *Blanus* is the sister-group to all remaining amphisbaenians. Crythiosauridae is removed from the Amphisbaenia because no support was found for its inclusion.

The deep nesting of rhineurids within Amphisbaenia found here contrasts with their extensive fossil record beginning in the late Paleocene. This hypothesis implies significant gaps in the fossil record of all other amphisbaenian taxa, and the reacquisition of some seemingly primitive features in some fossil rhineurids. However, the condition of the limbs in extinct rhineurids is uncertain and, if they are found to be present, the related characters could place them in a more basal position, which would then alter interpretations of character evolution. The basal positions of *Bipes* and *Blanus* imply that a round-headed cranial shape is the primitive condition for Amphisbaenia in contrast to some previous hypotheses.

In this analysis, amphisbaenians are nested within Squamata, in contrast to a hypothesized relationship as the sister-group to the remainder of squamates (alone, with snakes, or with another group of limbless burrowing lizards, Dibamidae). Weak support was found for a relationship between amphisbaenians and Dibamidae as previously suggested by some other analyses, but this is based mainly on reduction and absence features and the sister-group to Amphisbaenia is considered here to be inconclusive. *Sineoamphisbaena* is found to be related to macrocephalosaurs, an extinct group previously placed with Teiidae, but placed basally among squamates by this analysis.

Morphological analyses of squamates in this study include numerous features associated with reduced or absent limbs and limb girdles, as well as other specializations presumed to be related to a burrowing lifestyle. These characters are often hypothesized to have been convergently acquired among limbless squamate clades and have been excluded or downweighted in some previous analyses. This approach is difficult to implement here because further anatomical investigations of these structures revealed useful variation for resolving relationships within amphisbaenians. Future studies will require new approaches that can address the convergence problem in a manner that does not involve the added problem of removing characters informative at other levels. They should also include the addition of novel data sets.

A TRANSITION ZONE LIZARD COMMUNITY

A. García and D. M. Whalen [2003, J. Herpetology 37(2): 378-382] report that the Sonoran coast of Mexico is characterized by an abrupt transition from marine bay to inland desert. The authors surveyed lizard species along 141 transects in desert shrubland, desert-dune scrub transitional, dune scrub, and sandy intertidal habitat areas within this transition zone. *Cnemidophorus tigris*, *Uta stansburiana* and *Callisaurus draconoides* accounted for > 99% ($N = 353$) of individuals identified. *Cnemidophorus tigris* was almost entirely restricted to desert shrubland, *U. stansburiana* was mostly restricted to desert shrubland and desert-dune scrub transitional habitats, and *C. draconoides* was the most generalized in habitat use. It exhibited strong preferences for bare ground and was the only species observed in the sandy intertidal zone, an area devoid of vegetation. The intertidal zone had the highest lizard biomass of the four habitats but was completely dominated by a single species. Total lizard density and biomass were substantially less in desert shrubland, but lizard diversity was greatest in this structurally complex habitat. The authors suggest that habitat structure regulates lizard diversity, whereas food resources control lizard density across the transition zone.

SHARING AMAZONIAN RAINFOREST TREES

L. J. Vitt et al. [2003, J. Herpetology 37(2):276-285] studied the ecology of *Anolis punctatus* and *Anolis transversalis* at six localities in the Amazon region of Ecuador and Brazil from 1994 through 1999. Both lizards are arboreal, about the same size (*A. punctatus* slightly larger) but differ in some body proportions. *Anolis transversalis* is restricted to undisturbed primary forest more so than *A. punctatus*, but both use similar microhabitats. During midday, *A. transversalis* was not observed, suggesting that individuals may not be active near the ground at that time. Both species are thermal conformers although each was able to maintain T_b slightly higher than that of its perch. Most lizards contained prey, and, overall, a positive relationship existed between lizard body size (SVL) and mean prey volume. Volumetrically, *A. punctatus* ate mostly ants and orthopterans, whereas *A. transversalis* ate mostly roaches, beetles, and ants. Dietary overlaps were low (0.56). These two species can be considered "crown giants" among Amazonian anoles. Similar to many Amazonian rainforest lizards, ecological traits of *A. punctatus* and *A. transversalis* render them likely candidates for local extinction when deforestation occurs.

Advertisements

For sale: rats and mice—pinkies, fuzzies and adults. Quantity discounts. Please send a SASE for pricelist or call Bill Brant, *THE GOURMET RODENT*, 6115 SW 137th Avenue, Archer FL 32618, (352) 495-9024, E-mail: GrmtRodent@aol.com.

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For sale: natural history books. *Ecology and Natural History of Desert Lizards* by Eric Pianka, 1986, 208 pp., many tables and figs., a synthesis of the author's research on lizards of western U.S., southern Africa and western Australia, softbound, $32; *The Fauna of British India—Reptilia and Amphibia, Vol. 3 - Serpentes* by Malcolm Smith, 1961 (1943), 583 pp., 166 figs., good natural history info, hardbound, $75; *Birds of Colorado* by Bailey and Niedrach, 1965, 2 vols. (895 pp. total), 124 color plates, like-new condition, DJ, hardbound, $150; *Raymond L. Ditmars - His Exciting Career with Reptiles, Animals and Insects*, 1944, 255 pp., DJ, $20; *The Reptile World* by Clifford Pope, 1955, 324 pp., 221 b&w photos, inscription (not by author) inside front cover, no DJ, hardbound, $25; *Snakes & Lizards of Australia* by David McPhee, 2nd ed., 1963, 125 pp., b&w photos, last 35 pp. somewhat water warped, softbound pocket book $26. All books in excellent condition unless otherwise indicated. Orders of $25 or more include postage; $2.50 postage and handling for orders under $25. Send E-mail address for complete booklist. William R. Turner, 7395 S. Downing Circle West, Littleton, CO 80122, (303) 795-5128. E-mail: toursbyturner@aol.com.

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Wanted: I'm looking for my soulmate. I want to settle down to a family before it is too late. But I have this problem. . . . When we get into hobbies and interests: old popular records, jazz and show tunes, and antique electronics are fine, but when I mention turtles, "What, are you crazy?" So maybe this is a better place to look. Please don't try to separate me from my turtles—at least not most of them. If interested, please drop a line to Ellis Jones, 1000 Dell, Northbrook IL 60062, telling a bit about yourself and giving a phone number.

Wanted: big-headed turtles; mata mata turtles; Mexican giant mud turtles (*Staurotypus triporcatus*); exceptionally large common snappers (45 lbs. & up); large alligator snappers (over 90 lbs.); spectacled caiman from Trinidad, Tobago and Surinam; dwarf caiman; smooth-fronted caiman; albino turtles (except red-eared sliders). Walt Loose, (610) 926-6028, 9:00 A.M. – 1:00 P.M. or after 11:30 P.M. Eastern Time.

Line ads in this publication are run free for CHS members—$2 per line for nonmembers. Any ad may be refused at the discretion of the Editor. Submit ads to: Michael Dloogatch, 6048 N. Lawndale Avenue, Chicago IL 60659, (773) 588-0728 evening telephone, (312) 782-2868 fax, E-mail: <MADadder0@aol.com>.

Statement of Ownership, Management and Circulation

1. Publication Title	2. Publication Number	3. Filing Date
Bulletin of the Chicago Herpetological Society	019786	October 1, 2003
4. Issue Frequency	**5. Number of Issues Published Annually**	**6. Annual Subscription Price**
Monthly	12	$25.00
7. Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication		**Contact Person:** Michael Dloogatch
Chicago Herpetological Society, 2430 N. Cannon Drive, Chicago IL 60614-2874		(312) 782-2026

8. Complete Mailing Address of Headquarters or General Business Office of Publisher
Chicago Herpetological Society, 2430 N. Cannon Drive, Chicago IL 60614-2874

9. Full Names and Complete Mailing Addresses of Publisher, Editor and Managing Editor

Publisher: Chicago Herpetological Society, 2430 N. Cannon Drive, Chicago IL 60614-2874

Editor: Michael Dloogatch, c/o Schiller Consulting, 11 S. LaSalle Street, #2703, Chicago IL 60603-1304

Managing Editor: N/A

10. Owner
Chicago Herpetological Society, 2430 N. Cannon Drive, Chicago IL 60614-2874

11. Known Bondholders, Mortgagees and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages or Other Securities
None

12. Tax Status
Has Not Changed during Preceding 12 Months

13. Publication Title	14. Issue Date for Circulation Data Below
Bulletin of the Chicago Herpetological Society	September 2003

15. Extent and Nature of Circulation			Average No. Copies Each Issue during Preceding 12 Months	No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
a. Total Number of Copies (*Net press run*)			900	900
b. Paid and/or Requested Circulation	(1)	Paid/Requested Outside-County Mail Subscriptions Stated on Form 3541	543	528
	(2)	Paid In-County Subscriptions Stated on Form 3541	186	183
	(3)	Sales through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, Counter Sales and Other Non-USPS Paid Distribution		
	(4)	Other Classes Mailed through the USPS		
c. Total Paid and/or Requested Circulation [*Sum of 15b. (1), (2), (3) and (4)*]			729	711
d. Free Distributiuon by Mail	(1)	Outside-County as Stated on Form 3541	8	8
	(2)	In-County as Stated on Form 3541	4	4
	(3)	Other Classes Mailed through the USPS		
e. Free Distribution outside the Mail				
f. Total Free Distribution (*Sum of 15d. and 15e.*)			12	12
g. Total Distribution (*Sum of 15c. and 15f.*)			741	723
h. Copies Not Distributed			159	177
i. Total (*Sum of 15g. and 15h.*)			900	900
j. Percent Paid and/or Requested Circulation (*15c. divided by 15g. times 100*)			98.3	98.3

16. Publication of Statement of Ownership
Required. Will appear in the October 2003 issue of this publication.

17. Signature of Editor Michael Dloogatch

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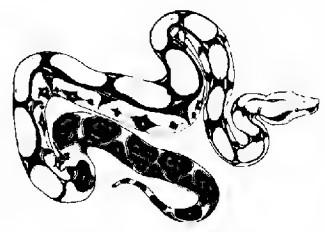

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News and Announcements

2004 CHS HERPETOLOGICAL GRANTS PROGRAM

The Chicago Herpetological Society announces the 2004 CHS Herpetological Grants Program to award financial support for herpetological research, education and conservation. Several awards of up to $500 each will be available. Interested parties may apply for a grant in any one of the following categories:

1. Illinois Herpetology
2. Graduate Student Research in Herpetology
3. Undergraduate Research in Herpetology
4. Conservation
5. Captive Management, Husbandry, and Propagation

An attempt will be made to award grants in each category, but depending on the applications received, not all categories may receive awards. Some categories may receive more than one award. The CHS Grants Committee reserves the right to reassign the category under which a given proposal is submitted.

To qualify for a grant, the applicant must be a member of the Chicago Herpetological Society as of December 31, 2003. In accepting a grant, the recipient agrees to abide by all state and federal laws, and to acknowledge the Chicago Herpetological Society in any publications or public presentations (e.g., posters, papers at symposia, etc.) that result from the subsidized research. Recipients should inform the CHS Grants Committee when their funded projects are completed, and will be encouraged to submit their work as an article for the CHS *Bulletin*, or will be invited to present a program at a CHS general meeting.

Proposals should include the following:

1. Statement of the objectives of the proposal, and a statement assigning the proposal to one of the five categories listed above.
2. Description of materials and methods.
3. Complete budget, not to exceed $500.
4. Brief résumé of the applicant, if an individual. If the applicant is an organization, background information on that organization should be included.
5. Letters of support from collaborating partners or institutions are encouraged; student applicants must include a letter of support from a faculty adviser (see further instruction below).
6. Anticipated completion date for the project.

Proposals may be submitted either by postal mail at the address below or as E-mail attachments. It is not necessary to submit proposals by both methods. Letter(s) of support sent by postal mail should be included with the other application materials but in a separate, smaller sealed envelope. Letters of support may be E-mailed, but then should include a postal address and phone number at which the writer can be contacted. Proposals must include the applicant's name and address on the first page. Proposals should be typed using a common font (e.g., Arial, Times, Courier) no smaller than 10pt, and should be double-spaced. When submitting proposals by mail, send two copies of the entire package (i.e., including résumé, budget, letters of support, etc.) in the same envelope. Applications should be brief and simple. Avoid inclusion of color images or large tables unless absolutely necessary. Complete proposal packages should not exceed five double-spaced pages (excluding literature citations, applicant's résumé and letter[s] of support). Applications must be received by 31 December 2003, and awards will be announced by 15 February 2004.

Submit paper applications to:

Chicago Herpetological Society
Grants Program
2430 North Cannon Drive
Chicago IL 60614

Electronic submissions should be E-mailed to: CHSGrant@aol.com.

Questions should be directed to Michael Dloogatch (773) 588-0728, or CHSGrant@aol.com.

U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SEEKS INFORMATION ON SNAKES OF THE GENUS *BOIGA*

The U. S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, has published a notice in the *Federal Register* requesting economic and scientific information about the snake genus *Boiga*. The information will be used to determine whether all or some of the 28 species of *Boiga* should be added to a list of "Injurious Wildlife." Injurious wildlife species are those that may pose threats to agriculture, horticulture, forestry, the health and welfare of human beings, or the welfare and survival of wildlife and wildlife resources in the U.S. Listing *Boiga* snakes as injurious would lead to prohibition of their importation into the U.S. or its territories. The genus *Boiga* includes rear-fanged and mildly venomous species. Introduction of the brown treesnake (*Boiga irregularis*) onto the island of Guam directly led to the extinction of a number of native birds there. Several species of *Boiga* occasionally are sold in the U.S. pet trade. Individuals with information on *Boiga* snakes are encouraged to comment by November 12, 2003. The full text of the *Federal Register* article can be viewed at: http://a257.g.akamaitech.net/7/257/2422/14mar20010800/edocket.access.gpo.gov/2003/pdf/03-23286.pdf

HERP OF THE MONTH

Each monthly meeting will showcase a different herp. CHS members are urged to bring one specimen of the "Herp of the Month" to be judged against the entries from other CHS members. Prizes will be awarded to the top three winners as follows: 1st place—6 raffle tickets at next meeting; 2nd place—4 raffle tickets at next meeting; 3rd place—2 raffle tickets at next meeting. Here are the categories for the coming months:

Month	Description of Contestants
October 2003	Bearded dragons
November 2003	Tortoises
December 2003	Python species that do not exceed 8' in length
January 2004	Herps from South America
February 2004	Herps from Africa
March 2004	Amphibians of the world
April 2004	Beginner herps
May 2004	Herps from Madagascar

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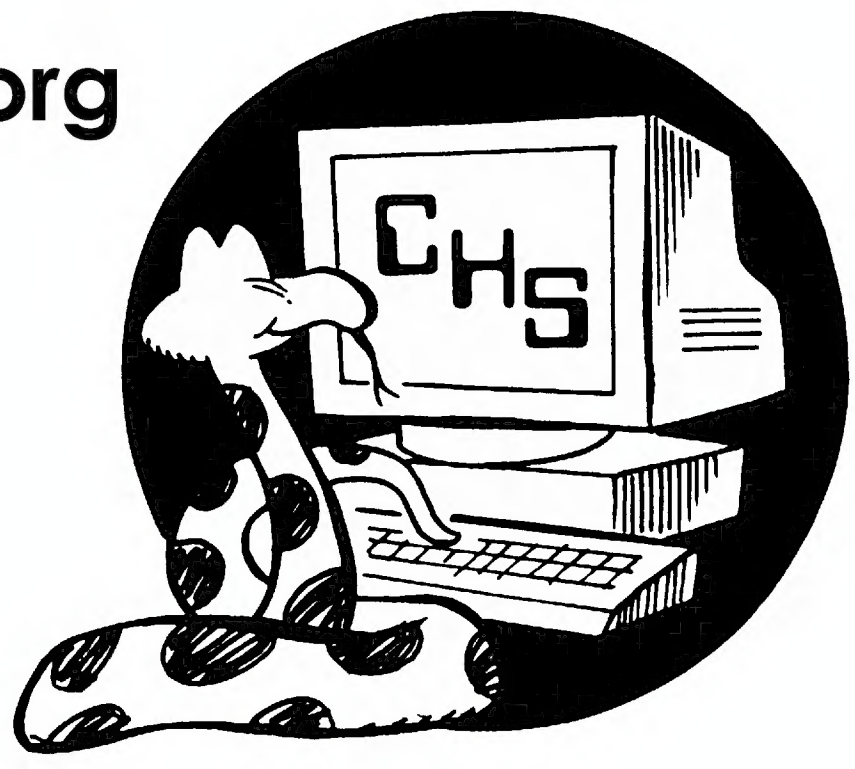

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UPCOMING MEETINGS

The next meeting of the Chicago Herpetological Society will be held at 7:30 P.M., Wednesday, October 29, at the Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum, Cannon Drive and Fullerton Parkway, in Chicago. **Geoffrey G. Sorrell**, a student at Auburn University, Alabama, will speak on the "Population Ecology of the Eyelash Viper, *Bothriechis schlegelii*, in Western Panama." His study was partially funded by a Chicago Herpetological Society grant last year.

The November 26 meeting will include the annual election of officers and members-at-large of the CHS Board of Directors. An entertaining program is also being planned.

The regular monthly meetings of the Chicago Herpetological Society are held at Chicago's newest museum—the **Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum**. This beautiful new building is at Fullerton Parkway and Cannon Drive, directly across Fullerton from the Lincoln Park Zoo. Meetings are held the last Wednesday of each month, from 7:30 P.M. through 9:30 P.M. Parking is free on Cannon Drive. A plethora of CTA buses stop nearby.

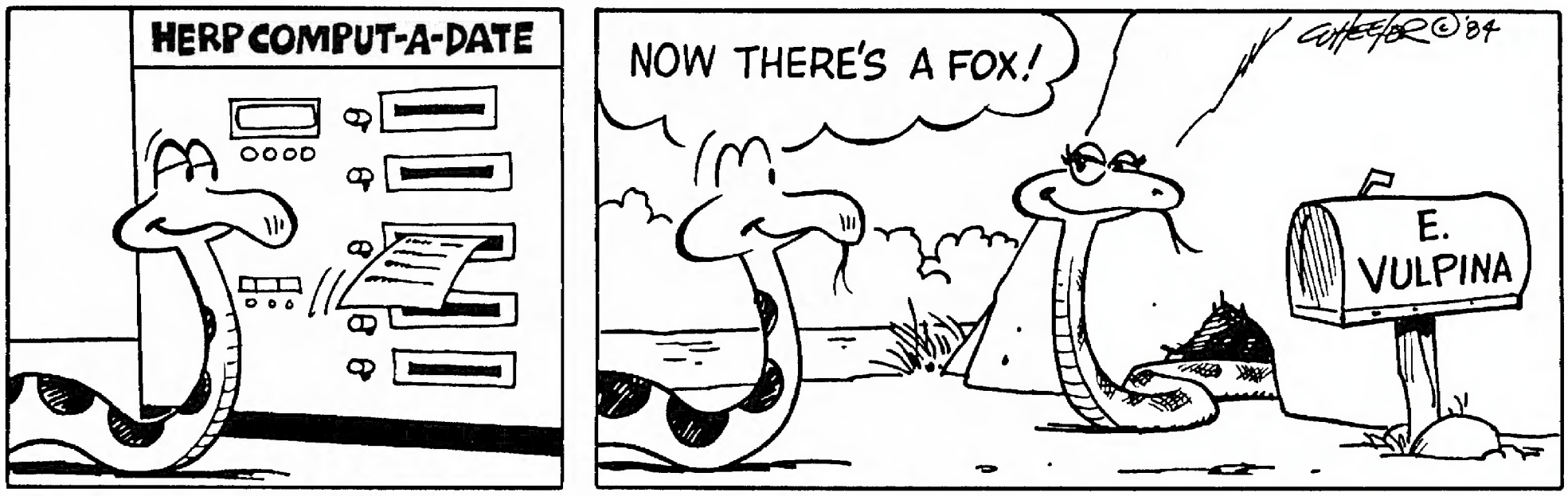
Board of Directors Meeting

Are you interested in how the decisions are made that determine how the Chicago Herpetological Society runs? And would you like to have input into those decisions? If so, mark your calendar for the October 17 board meeting, to be held at the North Park Village Administration Building, 5801 North Pulaski Road, Chicago. To get there take the Edens Expressway, I-94, and exit at Peterson eastbound. Go a mile east to Pulaski, turn right and go south to the first traffic light. Turn left at the light into the North Park Village complex. At the entrance is a stop sign and a guardhouse. When you come to a second stop sign, the administration building is the large building ahead and to your left. There is a free parking lot behind the building.

The Chicago Turtle Club

The monthly meetings of the Chicago Turtle Club are informal; questions, children and animals are welcome. Meetings normally take place at the North Park Village Nature Center, 5801 N. Pulaski, in Chicago. Parking is free. For more info call Lisa Koester, (773) 508-0034, or visit the CTC website: http://www.geocities.com/~chicagoturtle.

THE ADVENTURES OF SPOT



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